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SUNRISE

A STORY OF THESE TIMES.

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BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "A PRINCESS OF THULE," "A DAUGHTER OF HETH,"
"MACLEOD OF DARE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SUNRISE.

CHAPTER I.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN Ferdinand Lind told Calabressa that Natalie had grown to be a woman, he no doubt meant what he said: but he himself had not the least notion what the phrase implied. He could see, of course, that she had now a woman's years, stature, self-possession; but for all that she was still to him only a child—only the dark-eyed, gentle, obedient little Natalushka, who used to be so proud when she was praised for her music, and whose only show of resolution was when she set to work on the grammar of a new language. Indeed, it is the commonest thing in the world for a son, or a daughter, or a friend to grow in years without those nearest them being aware of

the fact, until some chance circumstance, some crisis, causes a revelation, and we are astounded at the change that time has insidiously made.

Such a discovery was now about to confront Ferdinand Lind. He was to learn, not only that his daughter had left the days of her childhood behind her, but also that the womanhood to which she had attained was of a fine and firm character, a womanhood that rang true when tried. And this is how the discovery was forced on him.

On his arrival in London, Mr. Lind drove first to Lisle Street, to pick up letters on his way home. Beratinsky was in the place. Beratinsky had little news about business matters to impart; but instead he began—as Lind was looking at some of the envelopes—to drop hints about Brand. It was easy to see now, he said, why the rich Englishman was so eager to join them, and give up his life in that way. It was not for nothing. Mr. Lind would doubtless hear more at home. And so forth.

Mr. Lind was thinking of other things, but when he came to understand what these innuendoes meant, he was neither angry nor impatient. He

had much toleration for human weakness; and he took it that Beratinsky was only a little off his head with jealousy. He was aware that it had been Beratinsky's ambition to become his son-in-law: a project that swiftly came to an end, through the perfect unanimity of father and daughter on that point.

"You are a fool, Beratinsky," he said, as he tied the bundle of letters together. "At your time of life you should not imagine that every one's head is full of philandering nonsense. Mr. Brand has something else to think of. Besides, he has been in the midland counties all this time."

"Has he? Who, then, was taking your daughter to dinner-parties, to theatres—I don't know what?"

Lind dealt gently with this madness.

"Who told you?"

"I have eyes, and ears."

"Put them to a better use, Beratinsky."

Then he left, and the Hansom carried him along to Curzon Street. Natalie herself flew to the door when she heard the cab drive up: there she was to receive him—smiling a welcome—and so like her mother that he was almost startled.

She caught his face in her two hands, and kissed him.

"Ah, papa, why did you not let me come to meet you at Liverpool?"

"There were too many with me, Natalie. I was busy. Now get Anneli to open my portmanteau, and you can find out for yourself all the things I have brought for you."

"I do not care for them, papa; I like to have you yourself back."

"I suppose you were rather dull, Natalushka, being all by yourself?"

"Sometimes. But I will tell you all that has happened when you are having breakfast."

"I have had breakfast, child. Now I shall get through my letters, and you can tell me all that has happened afterwards."

This was equivalent to a dismissal; so Natalie went upstairs, leaving her father to go into the small study, where lay another bundle of letters for him.

Almost the first that he opened was from George Brand; and to his amazement he found, not details about progress in the north, but a simple, straightforward, respectful demand to be

permitted to claim the hand of Natalie in marriage. He did not conceal the fact that this proposal had already been made to Natalie herself; he ventured to hope that it was not distasteful to her; he would also hope that her father had no objections to urge. It was surely better that the future of a young girl in her position should be provided for. As regarded himself, Mr. Lind's acquaintance with him was no doubt but recent and comparatively slight; but if he wished any further, and natural, inquiry into the character of the man to whom he was asked to entrust his daughter, Lord Evelyn might be consulted as his closest friend. And a speedy answer was requested.

This letter was on the whole rather a calm and business-like performance. Brand could appeal to Natalie, and that earnestly and honestly enough; he felt he could not bring himself to make any such appeal to her father. Indeed, any third person reading this letter would have taken it to be more of the nature of a formal demand, or something required by the conventionalities; a request the answer to which was not of tremendous importance, seeing that the two

persons most interested had already come to an understanding.

But Mr. Lind did not look at it in that light at all. He was at first surprised; then vexed and impatient, rather than angry; then determined to put an end to this nonsense at once. If he had deemed the matter more serious, he would have sat down and considered it with his customary forethought. But he was merely irritated.

"Beratinsky was not so mad as I took him to be, after all," he said to himself. "Fortunately, the affair has not gone too far."

He carried the open letter upstairs, and found Natalie in the drawing-room, dusting some pieces of Venetian glass.

"Natalie," he said, with an abruptness that startled her—and in a tone of anger which was just a little bit affected—"Natalie, what is the meaning of this folly?"

She turned, and regarded him. He held the open letter in his hand. She said, calmly—

"I do not understand you."

This only vexed him the more.

"I ask you what you have been doing in my absence?" he said, angrily. "What have you

been doing to entitle any man to write me such a letter as this? His affection! your future!—has he not something else to think of? And you—you seem not to have been quite so dull when I was away, after all! Well, it is time to have an end of it. Whatever nonsense may have been going on, I hope you have both of you come to your senses. Let me hear no more of it!"

Now she saw clearly what the letter must contain; what had stirred her father to such an unusual exhibition of wrath. She was a little pale; but not afraid. There was no tremor in her voice as she spoke.

"I am sorry, papa, you should speak to me like that. I think you forget that I am no longer a child. I have done nothing that I am ashamed of; and if Mr. Brand has written to you, I am willing to share the responsibility of anything he says. You must remember, papa, that I am a woman; and that I ought to have a voice in anything that concerns my own happiness."

He looked at her, almost with wonder, as if he did not quite recognize her. Was this the gentle-natured little Natalushka, whose eyes would

fill with tears if she was scolded even in fun?—this tall, self-possessed girl, with the pale face, and the firm and even tones?

"Do you mean to tell me, Natalie, that it is with your consent Brand has written to me?" her father asked, with frowning brows.

"I did not know he would write. I expected he would."

"Perhaps," said he, with an ironical smile—"perhaps you have taken time by the forelock, and already promised to be his wife?"

The answer was given with the same proud composure.

"I have not. But I have promised, if I am not his wife, never to be the wife of any other man."

It was now that Lind began to perceive how serious this matter was. This was no school-girl to be frightened out of a passing fancy. He must appeal to the reason of a woman; and the truth is, that if he had known he had this to undertake, he would not so hastily have gone into that drawing-room, with the open letter in his hand.

"Sit down, Natalie," he said, quite gently.

"I want to talk to you. I spoke hastily; I was surprised and angry. Now let us see calmly how matters stand; I dare say no great harm has been done yet."

She took a seat opposite him; there was not the least sign of any girlish breaking down, even when he spoke to her in this kind way.

"I have no doubt you acted quite rightly and prudently when I was away; and as for Mr. Brand, well, any one can see that you have grown to be a good-looking young woman, and of course he would like to have a good-looking young wife to show off among the country people and to go riding to hounds with him. Let us see what is involved in your becoming his wife, supposing that were ever seriously to be thought of. You give up all your old sympathies and friends, your interest in the work we have on hand, and you get transferred to a Buckinghamshire country-house to take the place of the old housekeeper. If you do not hear anything of what is going on—of our struggles—of your friends all over Europe: what of that? You will have the kitchen-garden to look after, and poultry to feed; and your neighbours will talk to you at dinner about foxes

and dogs and horses, and the clergyman's charities. It will be a healthy life, Natalie; perhaps you will get stout and rosy like an English matron. But your old friends--you will have forgotten them."

"Never!—never!" she said, vehemently; and despite herself her eyes filled with tears.

"Then we will take Mr. Brand. The Buckinghamshire house is open again. An Englishman's house is his castle; there is a great deal of work in superintending it, its entertainments, its dependents. Perhaps he has a pack of fox-hounds; no doubt he is a Justice of the Peace, and the terror of poachers. But in the midst of all this hunting, and giving of dinner-parties, and shooting of pheasants, do you think he has much time or thought for the future of the millions of poor wretches all over Europe who once claimed his care? Not much! That was in his days of irresponsible bachelorhood. Now he is settled down. He is a country gentleman. The world can set itself right without him. He is anxious about the price of wheat."

"Ah, how you mistake him, papa!" said she, proudly. And there was a proud light on her

face too as she rose and quickly went to a small escritoire close by. A few seconds sufficed her to write a short note, which she brought back to her father.

"There," said she, "I will abide by that test. If he says 'yes,' I will never see him again—never speak one word to him again."

Her father took the note and read it. It was as follows—

"*My dear friend,—I am anxious about the future, for both of us. If you will promise me, now, and at once, to give up the work you are engaged in, I will be your wife, when and where you will.—Natalie.*"

"Send it!" she said, proudly. "I am not afraid. If he says 'yes,' I will never see him again."

The challenge was not accepted. He tore the note in two, and flung it into the grate.

"It is time to put an end to this folly," he said, impatiently. "I have shown you what persistence in it would bring on yourself. You would be estranged from everything and every one you have hitherto been interested in; you would have to begin a new life, for which you are

not fitted; you would be the means of doing our cause an irreparable injury. Yes, I say so frankly. The withdrawal of this man Brand, which would certainly follow, sooner or later, on his marriage, would be a great blow to us. We have need of his work; we have still more need of his money. And it is you, you of all people in the world, who would be the means of taking him away from us."

"But it is not so, papa," she said, in great distress. "Surely you do not think that I am begging to be allowed to become his wife? That is for him to decide; I will follow his wishes, as far as I can, as far as you will allow me, papa. But this I know, that so far from that interfering with the work he has undertaken, it would only spur him on. Should I have thought of it, otherwise? Ah, surely you know—you have said so to me yourself—he is not one to go back."

"He is an Englishman; you do not understand Englishmen," her father said; and then he added, firmly, "You are not to be deterred by what may happen to yourself. Well, consider what may happen to him. I tell you, I will not have this risk run. George Brand is too valuable to us. If you or he persist in this folly, it will be

necessary to provide against all contingencies by procuring his banishment."

"Banishment!" she exclaimed, with a quick and frightened look.

"That may not sound much to you," said her father, calmly, "for you have scarcely what may be called a native country. You have lived anywhere, everywhere. It is different with an Englishman, who has his birthplace, his family estate, his friends in England."

"What do you mean, papa?" said she, in a low voice. She had not been frightened by the fancy picture he had drawn of her own future; but this ominous threat about her lover seemed full of menace.

"I say that at all hazards," Lind continued, looking at her from under the bushy eyebrows, "this folly must be brought to an end. It is not expedient that a marriage between you and Mr. Brand should even be thought of. You have both got other duties, inexorable duties. It is my business to see that nothing comes in the way of their fulfilment. Do you understand?"

She sat dumb now, with a vague fear about the future of her lover; for herself she had no fear.

"Some one must be sent to Philadelphia, to remain there probably for his lifetime. Do not drive me to send George Brand."

"Papa!" It was a cry of appeal; but he paid no heed. This matter he was determined to settle at once.

"Understand, this idle notion must be dropped; otherwise George Brand goes to the States forthwith; and remains there. Fortunately, I don't suppose the matter has gone far enough to cause either of you any deep misery. This is not what one would call a madly impassioned letter."

She scarcely perceived the sneer; some great calamity had befallen her, of which she as yet scarcely knew the extent; she sat mute and bewildered—too bewildered to ask why all this thing should be.

"That may not seem much to you," he said, in the same cold, implacable way. "But banishment for life from his native country, his home, his friends, is something to an Englishman. And if we are likely to lose his work in this country, through a piece of sentimental folly, we shall take care not to lose it in America."

She rose.

"Is that all, papa?"

She seemed too stunned to say any more.

He rose also, and took her hand.

"It is better to have a clear understanding, Natalie. Some might say that I object to your marrying because you are a help to me, and your going away would leave the house empty. Perhaps you may have some kind friend put that notion into your head. But that is not the reason why I speak firmly to you, why I show you you must dismiss this fancy of the moment—if you have entertained it as well as he—as impossible. I have larger interests at stake; I am bound to sacrifice every personal feeling to my duty. And I have shown you what would be the certain result of such a marriage: therefore, I say, such a marriage is not to be thought of. Come, now, Natalie, you claim to be a woman: be a woman! Something higher is wanted from you. What would all our friends think of you if you were to sink into a position like that—the housekeeper of a country squire?"

She said nothing; but she went away to her own room, and sat down, her face pale, her heart

like lead. And all her thought was of this possible doom hanging over him if he persisted; and she guessed, knowing something of him, whether he was likely to be dissuaded by a threat.

Then, for a second or so, a wild, despairing fancy crossed her mind; and her fingers tightened; and the proud mouth grew firm. If it was through her that this penalty of banishment overtook him—why should she not do as others had done?

But no—that was impossible. She had not the courage to make such an offer. She could only sit and think; and the picture before her imagination was that of her lover sailing away from his native land. She saw the ship getting further and further away from English shores, until it disappeared altogether in a mist of rain—and tears.

CHAPTER II.

EVASIONS.

It was in Manchester, whither he had gone to meet the famous John Molyneux, that George Brand awoke on this dull and drizzly morning. The hotel was almost full. He had been sent to the top floor; and now the outlook from the window was dismal enough—some slated roofs, a red chimney or two, and further off the higher floors of a lofty warehouse, in which the first signs of life were becoming visible. Early as it was, there was a dull roar of traffic in the distance; occasionally there was the scream of a railway whistle.

Neither the morning nor the prospect was conducive to a cheerful view of life; and perhaps that was why, when he took in his boots and found in one of them a letter, deposited there by the chambermaid, which he at once saw was

in Ferdinand Lind's handwriting, that he instantly assumed, mentally, an attitude of defiance. He did not open the letter just then. He took time to let his opposition harden. He knew there would be something or somebody to fight. It was too much to expect that everything should go smoothly. If there was such a thing as a law of compensation, that beautiful dream-like evening at the opera—the light, the colour, the softened music; the scent of white-rose; the dark, soft eyes, and the last pressure of the hand; the forget-me-nots he carried away with him—would have to be paid for somehow. And he had always distrusted Ferdinand Lind. His instinct assured him that this letter, which he had been looking for and yet dreading, contained a distinct refusal.

His instinct was completely at fault. The letter was exceedingly kind and suave. Mr. Lind might try to arouse his daughter from this idle day-dream by sharp words and an ominous threat; he knew that it was otherwise he must deal with Mr. George Brand.

"My dear Mr. Brand," he wrote, "as you may imagine, your letter has surprised me not a little, and pleased me too; for a father naturally is

proud to see his daughter thought well of; and your proposal is very flattering. Especially, I may add, as you have seen so little of Natalie. You are very kind—and bold, and unlike English nature—to take her and her family on trust, as it were; for are not your countrymen very particular as to the relatives of those they would marry with? and of Natalie's relatives and friends how many have you seen? Excuse me if I do not quite explain myself, for writing in English is not as familiar to me as to Natalie, who is quite an Englishwoman now. Very well; I think it is kind of you to think so highly of my daughter as to offer her to make her your wife, you knowing so little of her. But there you do not mistake; she is worthy to be the wife of any one. If she ever marries, I hope she will be as good a wife as she has been a daughter."

"If she ever marries:" this phrase sounded somewhat ominous; and yet, if he meant to say "No," why not say it at once? Brand hastily glanced over the letter, to find something definite; but he found that would not do. He began again, and read with deliberation. The letter had obviously been written with care.

"I have also to thank you, besides for the very flattering proposal, for your care to put this matter before me at an early time. Regarding how little Natalie and you have seen each other, it is impossible that either her or your affection can be so serious that it is not fair to look on your proposal with some views as to expediency; and at an early time one can easily control one's wishes. I can answer for my daughter that she has always acted as I thought best for her happiness; and I am sure that now, or at any time, in whatever emergency, she would far prefer to have the decision rest with me, rather than take the responsibility on herself."

When George Brand came to this passage he read it over again; and his comment was, "My good friend, don't be too sure of that. It is possible that you have lived nineteen years with your daughter to very little purpose, so far as your knowledge of her character is concerned."

"Well, then, my dear sir," the letter proceeded, "all this being in such a way, might I ask you to reflect again over your proposal; and examine it from the view of expediency? You and I are not free agents, just to please ourselves when

we like. Perhaps I was wrong in my first objection to your very flattering proposal; I believed you might in marrying her withdraw from the work we are all engaged in; I feared this as a great calamity; an injury done to many to gratify the fancy of one. But Natalie, I will confess, scorned me for that doubt; and, indeed, was so foolish as to propose a little hoax, to prove to me that even if she promised to marry you as a reward she could not get you to abandon our cause. 'No, no,' she said. 'That is not to be feared. He is not one to go back.'"

When George Brand read these words, his breath came and went a little quickly. She should not find her faith in him misplaced.

"That is very well, very satisfactory, I said to her. We cannot afford to lose you, whatever happens. To return; there are more questions of expediency. For example, how can one tell what may be demanded of one? Would it be wise for you to be hampered with a wife, when you know not where you may have to go? Again, would not the cares of a household seriously interfere with your true devotion to your labours? You are so happily placed! You are free from

responsibilities: why increase them? At present Natalie is in a natural and comfortable position; she has grown accustomed to it; she is proud to know that she can be of assistance to us; her life is not an unhappy one. But consider—a young wife, separated from her husband, perhaps by the Atlantic; in a new home, with new duties; anxious, terrified with apprehensions: surely that is not the change you would wish to see?"

For a second Brand was almost frightened by this picture; and a pang of remorse flashed through his heart. But then his common sense reasserted itself. Why the Atlantic? Why should they be separated? Why should she be terrified with apprehensions?

"As regards her future," her father continued. "I am not an old man; and if anything were to happen to me, she has friends. Nor will I say to you a word about myself, or my claim on her society and help; for parents have not the right to sacrifice the happiness of their children to their own convenience; it is so fortunate when they find, however, that there is no disposition on the part of the young to break those ties that have been formed by the companionship of many

years. It is this, my dear friend and colleague, that makes me thank you for having spoken so early; that I can ask you to reconsider, and that I can advise my daughter, without the fear that I am acting in a tyrannical manner or thwarting any serious affection on her part. You will perceive I do not dictate. I ask you to think over whether it is wise for your own happiness—whether it would improve Natalie's probabilities of happiness—whether it would interfere in some measure with the work you have undertaken—if you continue to cherish this fancy, and let it grow on you. Surely it is better for a man to have but one purpose in life. Nevertheless, I am open to conviction.

"That reminds me that there is another matter on which I should like to say a few words to you when there is the chance. If there is a break in the current of your present negotiations, shall you have time to run up to London? Only this: you will, I trust, not seek to see Natalie or to write to her until we have come to an understanding. Again I thank you for having spoken to me so early, before any mischief can have been done. Think over what I have said, my

dear friend; and remember above all things where your chief duty lies.

"Yours sincerely,

"FERDINAND LIND."

He read this letter over two or three times, and the more he read it the more he was impressed with the vexatious conviction that it would be an uncommonly difficult thing to answer it. It was so reasonable, so sensible, so plausible. Then his old suspicions returned. Why was this man Lind so plausible? If he objected, why did he not say so outright? All these specious arguments: how was one to turn and twist, evading some, meeting others; and all the time taking it for granted that the happiness of two people's lives was to be dependent on such logic-chopping as could be put down on a sheet of paper?

Then he grew impatient. He would not answer the letter at all. Lind did not understand. The matter had got far ahead of this clever argumentation; he would appeal to Natalie herself; it was her "Yes" or "No" that would be final; not any contest and balancing of words. There were other words he could recall, of more im-

portance to him. He could almost hear them now, in the trembling, low voice: "*I will be your wife, or the wife of no one. Dear friend, I can say no more.*" And again, when she gave him the forget-me-nots: "*Whatever happens, you will remember that there was one who at least wished to be worthy of your love.*" He could remember the proud, brave look; again he felt the trembling of the hand that timidly sought his for an instant; he could almost scent the white-rose again, and hear the murmur of the people in the corridor. And this was the woman, into whose eyes he had looked as if they were the eyes of his wife, who was to be taken away from him by means of a couple of sheets of note-paper all covered over with little specious suggestions.

He thrust the letter into a pocket, and hurriedly proceeded with his dressing; for he had a breakfast-appointment. Indeed, before he was ready, the porter came up and said that a gentleman had called for him, and was waiting for him in the coffee-room.

"Ask him what he will have for breakfast; and let him go on. I shall be down presently."

When Brand did at length go down, he found

that his visitor had frankly accepted this permission, and had before him a large plate of corned beef, with a goodly tankard of beer. Mr. John Molyneux, although he was a great authority among English workmen generally, and especially among the trades-unionists of the north, had little about him of the appearance of the sleek-haired demagogue as that person is usually represented to us. He was a stout, yeoman-looking man, with a frosty-red face and short silver-white whiskers; he had keen, shrewd blue eyes; and a hand that gave a firm grip. The fact is, that Molyneux had in early life been a farmer, and a well-to-do farmer. But he had got smitten with the writings of Cobbett; and he began to write too. Then he took to lecturing—on the land laws, on Robert Owenism, on the Church of England, but more especially on co-operation. Finding, however, that all this pamphleteering and lecturing was playing ducks and drakes with his farming, and being in many respects a shrewd and sensible person, he resolved on selling out of his farm and investing the proceeds in the government stock of America, the country of his deepest admiration. In the end he found that he had about

£150 a year; on which he could live very comfortably; while giving up all his time and attention to his energetic propagandism. This was the person who now gave Brand a hearty greeting, and then took a long draught at the tankard of ale.

"You see, Mr. Brand," said he, looking cautiously around, and then giving a sly wink, "I thought we might have a chat by ourselves in this corner."

Brand nodded; there was no one near them.

"Now I have been considering about what you told me; and last night I called on Professor ——, of Owen's College, ye know, and I had some further talk with him. Well, sir, it's a grand scheme—splendid; and I don't wonder you've made such progress as I hear of. And when all the lads are going in for it, what would they say if old John Molyneux kept out—eh?"

"Why, they would say he had lost some of his old pluck; that's about what they would say, isn't it?" said Brand; though the fact was that he was thinking a good deal more about the letter in his pocket.

"There was one point, though, Mr. Brand,

that I did not put before either Professor —— or yourself; and it is important. The point is dibs."

"I beg your pardon," said Brand, absently; he was, in truth, recalling the various phrases and sentences in that letter of Ferdinand Lind.

"Dibs, sir—dibs," said the farmer-agitator, energetically. "You know what makes the mare to go. And you know these are not the best of times; and some of the lads will be thinking they pay enough into their own Union. That's what I want to know, Mr. Brand, before I can advise any one. You need money; how do you get it? What's the damage on joining, and after?"

Brand pulled himself together.

"Oh, money?" said he. "That need not trouble you. We exact nothing. How could we ask people to buy a pig in a poke? There's not a working-man in the country but would put us down as having invented an ingenious scheme for living on other people's earnings. It is not money we want; it is men."

"Yes, yes," said Molyneux, looking rather puzzled. "But when you've got the machine,

you want oil, eh? The basis of everything, sir, is dibs: what can ye do without it?"

"We want money, certainly," Brand said. "But we do not touch a farthing that is not volunteered. There are no compulsory subscriptions. We take it that the more a man sees of what we are doing, and of what has to be done, the more he will be willing to give, according to his means. And so far there has been no disappointment."

"H'm!" said Molyneux, doubtfully. "I reckon you won't get much from our chaps."

"You don't know. It is wonderful what a touch of enthusiasm will do—and emulation between the local centres. Besides, we are always having accessions of richer folk; and these are expected to make up all deficiencies."

"Ah?" said the other. "I see more daylight that way. Now you, Mr. Brand, must have been a good fat prize for them, eh?"

The shrewd inquiring glance that accompanied this remark set George Brand laughing.

"I see, Mr. Molyneux, you want to get at the 'dibs' of everything. Well, I can't enlighten you any further until you join us: you have not said whether you will or not."

"I will!" said the other, bringing his fist down on the table—though he still spoke in a loud whisper. "I'm your man! In for a penny, in for a pound!"

"I beg your pardon," said Brand, politely, "but you are in for neither, unless you like. You may be in for a good deal of work, though. You must bring us men; and you will be let off both the penny and the pound. Now, could you run up with me to London to-night, and be admitted to-morrow, and get to know something of what we are doing?"

"Is it necessary?"

"In your case, yes. We want to make you a person of importance."

So at last Molyneux agreed; and they started for London in the evening; the big, shrewd, farmer-looking man being as pleased as a child to have certain signs and passwords confided to him. Brand made light of these things—and, in fact, they were only such as were used among the outsiders; but Molyneux was keenly interested, and already pictured himself going through Europe and holding this subtle conversation with all the unknown companions whom chance might throw in his way.

But long ere he reached London, the motion of the train had sent him to sleep; and George Brand had plenty of time to think over that letter and to guess at what possible intention might lie under its plausible phrases. He had leisure to think of other things, too. The question of money, for example—about which Molyneux had been so curious—with regard to this association, was one on which he himself was but slightly informed; the treasury department being altogether outside his sphere. He did not even know whether Lind had private means; or was enabled to live as he did by the association, for its own ends. He knew that the Society had numerous paid agents; no doubt he himself could have claimed a salary, had it been worth his while. But the truth is that "dibs" concerned him very little. He had never been extravagant; he had always lived well within his income; and his chief satisfaction in being possessed of a liberal fortune lay in the fact that he had not to bother his head about money. There was one worry the less in life.

But then George Brand had been a good deal about the world, and had seen something of human life, and knew very well the power the

possession of money gives. Why, this very indifference, this happy carelessness about pecuniary details, was but the consequence of his having a large fund in the background that he could draw on at will. If he did not overvalue his fortune, on the other hand he did not undervalue it; and he was about the last man in the world who could reasonably have been expected to part with it.

CHAPTER III.

A TALISMAN.

NATALIE LIND was busy writing at the window of the drawing-room in Curzon Street, when Calabressa entered, unannounced. He had outstripped the little Anneli; perhaps he was afraid of being refused. He was much excited.

"Forgive me, signorina, if I startle you," he said rapidly, in his native tongue; "forgive me, little daughter. We go away to-night, I and the man Kirski, whom you saved from madness: we are ordered away; it is possible I may never see you again. Now listen."

He took a seat beside her; in his hurry and eagerness he had for the moment abandoned his airy manner.

"When I came here I expected to see you a school-girl—some one in safe keeping; with no troubles to think of. You are a woman; you

may have trouble; and it is I, Calabressa, who would then cut off my right hand to help you. I said I would leave you my address; I cannot. I dare not tell any one even where I am going. What of that? Look well at this card."

He placed before her a small bit of pasteboard, with some lines marked on it.

"Now we will imagine that some day you are in great trouble; you know not what to do; and you suddenly bethink yourself, 'Now it is Calabressa and the friends of Calabressa who must help me——'"

"Pardon me, signore," said Natalie, gently. "To whom should I go but to my father, if I were in trouble? And why should one anticipate trouble? If it were to come, perhaps one might be able to brave it?"

"My little daughter, you vex me. You must listen. If no trouble comes, well! If it does, are you any the worse for knowing that there are many on whom you can rely? Very well; look! This is the Via Roma in Naples."

"I know it," said Natalie: why should she not humour the good-natured old albino, who had been a friend of her mother's?

"You go along it until you come to this little lane; it is the Vico Carlo; you ascend the lane—here is the first turning—you go round, and behold! the entrance to a court. The court is dark; but there is a lamp burning all day; go further in, there are wine-vaults. You enter the wine-vaults, and say, 'Bartolotti.' You do not say, 'Is Signor Bartolotti at home?' or, 'Can I see the illustrious Signor Bartolotti;' but 'Bartolotti,' clear and short. You understand?"

"You give yourself too much trouble, signore."

"I hope so, little daughter. I hope you will never have to search for these wine-vaults; but who knows? *Alors*, one comes to you; and says, 'What is your pleasure, signorina?' Then you ask, 'Where is Calabressa?' The answer to that? It may be, 'We do not know,' or it may be, 'Calabressa is in prison again;' or it may be, 'Calabressa is dead.' Never mind. When Calabressa dies no one will care less than Calabressa himself."

"Some one would care, signore; you have a mother."

He took her hand.

"And a daughter, too," he said lightly, "if the wicked little minx would only listen. Then you

know what you must say to the man whom you will see at the wine-vaults; you must say this, 'Brother, I come with a message from Calabressa: it is the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi who demands your help.' Then do you know what will happen? From the next morning you will be under the protection of the greatest power in Europe; a power unknown but invincible; a power that no one dares to disobey. Ah, little one, you will find out what the friends of Calabressa can do for you when you appeal to them!"

He smiled proudly.

"Allons! Put this card away in a secret place. Do not show it to any one; let no one know the name I confided to you. Can you remember it, little daughter?"

"Bartolotti."

"Good. Now that is one point settled; here is the next. You do not seem to have any portrait of your mother, my little one?"

"Ah, no!" she exclaimed, quickly; for she was more interested now. "I suppose my father could not bear to be reminded of his loss: if there is any portrait, I have not seen it; and how could I ask him?

He regarded her for a moment; and then he spoke, more slowly than hitherto—

"Little Natalushka, I told you I am going away; and who knows what may happen to me? I have no money or land to leave to any one; if I had a wife and children the only name I could leave them would be the name of a jail-bird. If I were to leave a will behind me it would read, 'My heart to my beloved Italia; my curse to Austria; and my——' Ah, yes, after all I have something to leave to the little Natalushka."

He put his hand, which trembled somewhat, into the breast of his coat, and brought out a small leather case.

"I am about to give you my greatest treasure, little one; my only treasure. I think you will value it."

He opened the case and handed it to her; inside there was a miniature, painted on ivory; it might have been a portrait of Natalie herself. For some time the girl did not say a word; but her eyes slowly filled with tears.

"She was very beautiful, signore," she murmured.

"Ah, little daughter," he said, cheerfully, "I am glad to see the portrait in safe keeping at last. Many a risk I have run with it; many a time I have had to hide it. And you must hide it too; let no one see it but yourself. But now you will give me one of your own in exchange, my little one; and so the bargain is complete."

She went to the small table adjoining to hunt among the photographs.

"And lastly, one more point, Signorina Natalushka," said Calabressa, with the air of one who had got through some difficult work. "You asked me once to find out for you who was the lady from whom you received the little silver locket. Well, you see, that is now out of my power. I am going away. If you are still curious, you must ask some one else; but is it not natural to suppose that the locket may have been stolen a great many years ago and at last the thief resolves to restore it? No matter; it is only a locket."

She returned with a few photographs for him to choose from. He picked out two.

"There is one for me; there is one for my

old mother. I will say to her, 'Do you remember the young Hungarian lady who came to see you at Spezia? Put on your spectacles now, and see whether that is not the same young lady. Ah, good old mother; can you see no better than that?—that is not Natalie Berezolyi at all; that is her daughter, who lives in England. But she has not got the English way; she is not content when she herself is comfortable; she thinks of others; she has an ear for voices afar off.' That is what I shall say to the old mother."

He put the photographs in his pocket.

"In the mean time, my little daughter," said he, "now that our pressing business is over, one may speak at leisure; and what of you, now? My sight is not very good; but even my eyes can see that you are not looking cheerful enough. You are troubled, Natalushka; or you would not have forgotten to thank me for giving you the only treasure I have in the world."

The girl's pale face flushed; and she said quickly—

"There are some things that are not to be expressed in words, Signor Calabressa. I cannot tell you what I think of your kindness to me."

"Silence—silence! do you not understand my joking? *Eh, bien;* let us understand each other. Your father has spoken to me—a little, not much. He would rather have an end to the love-affair, *n'est ce pas?*"

"There are some other things that are not to be spoken of," the girl said, in a low voice, but somewhat proudly.

"Natalushka, I will not have you answer me like that. It is not right. If you knew all my history, perhaps you would understand why I ask you questions—why I interfere—why you think me impertinent——"

"Oh no, signore; how can I think that?"

She had her mother's portrait in her hand; she was gazing into the face that was so strangely like her own.

"Then why not answer me?"

She looked up with a quick, almost despairing look.

"Because I try not to think about it," she said, hurriedly. "Because I try to think only of my work. And now, Signor Calabressa, you have given me something else to think about; something to be my companion when I am alone; and from my heart I thank you!"

"But you speak as if you were in great grief, my little one. It is not all over between you and your lover?"

"How can I tell? What can I say?" she exclaimed; and for a moment her eyes looked up, with the appealing look of a child. "He does not write to me. I may not write to him. I must not see him."

"But then there may be reasons for delay and consideration, little Natalushka; your father may have reasons. And your father did not speak to me as if it were altogether impossible. What he said was, in effect, 'We will see—we will see.' However, let us return to the important point; it is my advice to you—you cannot have forgotten it—that whatever happens, whatever you may think, do not, little one, seek to go against your father's wishes. You will promise me that?"

"I have not forgotten, signore; but do you not remember my answer? I am no longer a child. If I am to obey, I must have reasons for obeying."

"What?" said he, smiling. "And you know that one of our chief principles is that obedience is a virtue in itself?"

"I do not belong to your association, Signor Calabressa."

"The little rebel!"

"No, no, signore; do not drive me into a a false position. I cannot understand my father, who has always been so kind to me; it is better not to speak of it; some day, when you come back, Signor Calabressa, you will find it all a forgotten story. Some people forget so readily; do they not?"

The trace of pathetic bitterness in her speech did not escape him.

"My child," said he, "you are suffering. I perceive it. But it may soon be over; and your joy will be all the greater. If not, if the future has trouble for you, remember what I have told you. *Allons donc!* Keep up a brave heart—but I need not say that to the child of the Berezolyis."

He rose; and at the same moment a bell was heard below.

"You are not going, Signor Calabressa? That must be my father."

"Your father!" he exclaimed; and he seemed confused. Then he added, quickly, "Ah, very

well. I will see him as I go down. Our business, little one, is finished; is it not? Now repeat to me the name I mentioned to you."

"Bartolotti?"

"Excellent, excellent. And you will keep the portrait from every one's eyes but your own. Now, farewell!"

He took her two hands in his.

"My beautiful child," said he, in rather a trembling voice, "may Heaven keep you as true and brave as your mother was—and send you more happiness. I may not see England again—no, it is not likely; but in after years you may sometimes think of old Calabressa, and remember that he loved you, almost as he once loved another of your name."

Surely she must have understood. He hurriedly kissed her on the forehead; and said, "Adieu, little daughter," and left. And when he had gone she sank into the chair again; and clasped both her hands round her mother's portrait, and burst into tears.

Calabressa made his way downstairs, and, at the foot, ran against Ferdinand Lind.

"Ah, amico mio," said he, in his gay manner.

"See now, we have been bidding our adieux to the little Natalushka—the rogue!—to pretend to me she had no sweetheart! Shall we have a glass of wine, *mon capitaine*, before we embark?"

"Yes, yes," said Lind, though without any great cordiality. "Come into my little room."

He led him into the small study; and presently there was wine upon the table. Calabressa was exceedingly vivacious; and a little difficult to follow, especially in his French. But Lind allowed him to rattle on, until by accident he referred to some meeting that was shortly to take place at Posilipo.

"Well, now, Calabressa," said Lind, with apparent carelessness, as he broke off a bit of biscuit and poured out a glass of wine for himself, "I suppose you know more about the opinions of the Council now than any one not absolutely within itself."

"I am a humble servant only, friend Lind," he remarked, as he thrust his fingers into the breast of his military-looking coat: "a humble servant of my most noble masters. But sometimes one hears—one guesses—mais à quel propos cette question, monsieur mon camarade?"

Lind regarded him; and said, slowly—

"You know, Calabressa, that some seventeen years ago I was on the point of being elected a member of the Council."

"I know it," said the other, with a little embarrassment.

"You know why—though you do not know the right or the wrong of it—all that became impossible."

Calabressa nodded. It was delicate ground, and he was afraid to speak.

"Well," said Lind, "I ask you boldly—do you not think I have done enough in these sixteen or seventeen years to reinstate myself? Who else has done a tithe of the work I have done?"

"Friend Lind, I think that is well understood at head-quarters."

"Very well, then, Calabressa, what do you think? Consider what I have done; consider what I have now to do; what I may yet do. There is this Zaccatelli business. I do not approve of it myself. I think it is a mistake, as far as England is concerned. The English will not hear of assassination—even though it is such a criminal as the *cardinale affamatore* who is to

be punished. But though I do not approve, I obey. Some one from the English section will fulfil that duty: it is something to be considered. Then money; think of the money I have contributed. Without English money what would have been done?—when there is any new levy wanted it is to England—to me—they apply first; and at the present moment their cry for money is more urgent than ever. Very well, then, my Calabressa; what do you think of all this?"

Calabressa seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"Friend Lind, I am not so far into their secrets as that. Being in prison so long, one loses terms of familiarity with many of one's old associates, you perceive? But your claims are undoubted, my friend; yes, yes, undoubted."

"But what do you think, Calabressa?" he said—and that affectation of carelessness had now gone: there was an eager look in the deep-set eyes under the bushy eyebrows. "What do you yourself think of my chance? It ought to be no chance; it ought to be a certainty. It is my due. I claim it as the reward of my sixteen years' work, to say nothing of what went before."

"Ah, naturellement, sans doute, tu as raison,

mon camarade," said the politic Calabressa, endeavouring to get out of the difficulty with a shrug of his shoulders. "But—but—the more one knows of the Council the more one fears prying into its secrets. No, no; I do what I am told; for the rest my ears are closed."

"If I were on the Council, Calabressa," said Lind, slowly, "you would be treated with more consideration. You have earned as much."

"A thousand thanks, friend Lind," said the other; "but I have no more ambitions now. The time for that is past. Let them make what they can out of old Calabressa—a stick to beat a dog with; as long as I have my liberty and a cigarette, I am content."

"Ah, well," said Lind, resuming his careless air, "you must not imagine I am seriously troubled because the Council have not as yet seen fit to think of what I have done for them. I am their obedient servant, like yourself. Some day, perhaps, I may be summoned."

"À la bonne heure!" said Calabressa, rising. "No, no more wine. Your port-wine here is glorious—it is a wine for the gods; but a very little is enough for a man. So, farewell, my good

friend Lind. Be kind to the beautiful Natalushka, if that other thing that I spoke of is impossible. If the bounty of Heaven had only given me such a daughter!"

"Kirski will meet you at the station," said Lind. "Charing Cross, you remember; eight sharp. The train is 8.25."

"I will be there."

They shook hands and parted; the door was shut. Then, in the street outside, Calabressa glanced up at the drawing-room windows just for a second.

"Ah, little daughter," he said to himself as he turned away, "you do not know the power of the talisman I have given you. But you will not use it. You will be happy; you will marry the Englishman; you will have little children round your knee; and you will lead so busy and glad a life, year after year, that you will never have a minute to sit down and think of old Calabressa, or of the stupid little map of Naples he left with you."

CHAPTER IV.

AN ALTERNATIVE.

ONCE again the same great city held these two. When George Brand looked out in the morning on the broad river, and the bridges, and the hurrying cabs and trains and steamers, he knew that this flood of dusky sunshine was falling also on the quieter ways of Hyde Park and the semi-silent thoroughfares adjoining. They were in the same city, but they were far apart. An invisible barrier separated them. It was not to Curzon Street that he directed his steps when he went out into the still, close air and the misty sunlight.

It was to Lisle Street that he walked; and all the way he was persuading himself to follow Calabressa's advice. He would betray no impatience, however specious Lind might be. He would shut down that distrust of Natalie's father that was continually springing up in his mind.

He would be considerate to the difficulties of his position, ready to admit the reasonableness of his arguments, mindful of the higher duties demanded of himself. But then—but then—he bethought him of that evening at the theatre; he remembered what she had said; how she had looked. He was not going to give up his beautiful, proud-natured sweetheart as a mere matter of expediency, as the conclusion of a clever bit of argument.

When he entered Mr. Lind's room he found Heinrich Reitzei its sole occupant. Lind had not yet arrived; the pallid-faced young man with the *pince-nez* was in possession of his chair. And no sooner had George Brand made his appearance than Reitzei rose, and, with a significant smile, motioned the new-comer to take the vacant seat he had just quitted.

"What do you mean?" Brand said, naturally taking another chair, which was much nearer him.

"Will you not soon be occupying this seat *en permanence?*" Reitzei said, with affected nonchalance.

"Lind has abdicated, then, I presume," said Brand, coldly: this young man's manner had never been very grateful to him.

Reitzei sank into the seat again, and twirled at his little black waxed moustache.

"Abdicated? No; not yet," he said, with an air of indifference. "But if one were to be translated to a higher sphere? There is a vacancy in the Council."

"Then he would have to live abroad," said Brand, quickly.

The younger man did not fail to observe this eagerness, and no doubt attributed it to a wrong cause. It was no sudden hope of succeeding to Lind's position that prompted the exclamation; it was the possibility of Natalie being carried away from England.

"He would have to live in the place called nowhere," said Reitzei, with a calm smile. "He would have to live in the dark—in the middle of the night—everywhere and nowhere at the same moment."

Brand was on the point of asking what would then become of Natalie, but he forbore. He changed the subject altogether.

"How is that mad Russian fellow getting on —Kirski? Still working?"

"Yes; at another kind of work. Calabressa

has undertaken to turn his vehemence into a proper channel—to let off the steam, as it were, in another direction."

"Calabressa?"

"Kirski has become the humble disciple of Calabressa, and has gone to Genoa with him."

"What folly is this!" Brand said. "Have you admitted that maniac?"

"Certainly; such force was not to be wasted."

"A pretty disciple! How much Russian does Calabressa know?"

"Gathorne Edwards is with them; it is some special business. Both Calabressa and Kirski will be capital linguists before it is over."

"But how has Edwards got leave again from the British Museum?"

Reitzei shrugged his shoulders.

"I believe Lind wants to buy him over altogether. We could pay him more than the British Museum."

At this moment there was a sound outside of some one ascending the stair, and directly afterwards Mr. Lind entered the room. As he came in, Reitzei left.

"How do you do, Mr. Brand?" Lind said,

shaking his visitor's hand with great warmth. "Very glad to see you looking so well; hard work does not hurt you, clearly. I hope I have not incommoded you in asking you to run up to London?"

"Not at all," Brand said. "Molyneux came up with me last night."

"Ah! You have gained him over?"

"Quite."

"Again I congratulate you. Well, now, since we have begun upon business, let us continue upon business."

He settled himself in his chair, as if for some serious talk. Brand could not help being struck by the brisk, vivacious, energetic look of this man; and on this morning he was even more than usually smartly dressed. Was it his daughter who had put that flower in his button-hole?

"I will speak frankly to you, and as clear as I can in my poor English. You must let me say, without flattery, that we are all very indebted to you—very proud of you; we are glad to have you with us. And now that you see further and further about our work, I trust you are not disappointed. You understand at the outset you must take so much on trust."

"I am not in the least disappointed; quite the reverse," Brand said—and he remembered Calabressa, and spoke in as friendly a way as possible. "Indeed, many a time I am sorry one cannot explain more fully to those who are only inquiring. If they could only see at once all that is going on, they would have no more doubt. And it is slow work with some of them."

"Yes, certainly; no doubt. Well, to return, if you please: it is a satisfaction you are not disappointed; that you believe we are doing a good work; that you go with us. Very well. You have advanced grade by grade; you see nothing to repent of; why not take the final step?"

"I don't quite understand you," he said, doubtfully.

"I will explain. You have given yourself to us—your time, your labour, your future; but the final step of self-sacrifice—is it so very difficult? In many cases it is merely a challenge: we say, 'Show that you can trust us even for your very livelihood. Become absolutely dependent on us, even for your food, your drink, your clothes.' In your case, I admit, it is something more: it is

an invitation to a very considerable self-sacrifice. All the more proof that you are not afraid."

"I do not think I am afraid," said Brand, slowly; "but——"

"One moment. The affair is simple. The officers of our society—those who govern—those from whom are chosen the members of the Council—that Council that is more powerful than any government in Europe—those officers, I say, are required first of all to surrender every farthing of personal property, so that they shall become absolutely dependent on the Society itself——"

Brand looked a trifle bewildered: more than that, resentful and indignant, as if his common sense had received a shock.

"It is a necessary condition," Lind continued, without eagerness—rather as if he were merely enunciating a theory. "It ensures absolute equality; it is a proof of faith. And you may perceive that, as I am alive, they do not allow one to starve."

The slight smile that accompanied this remark was meant to be reassuring. Certainly, Mr. Lind did not starve; if the Society of which he was

a member enabled him to live as he did in Curzon Street, he had little to complain of.

"You mean," said George Brand, "that before I enter this highest grade, next to the Council, I must absolutely surrender my entire fortune to you?"

"To the common fund of the Society—yes," was the reply; uttered as a matter of course.

"But there is no compulsion?"

"Certainly not. On this point every one is free. You may remain in your present grade, if you please."

"Then I confess to you I don't see why I should change," Brand said, frankly. "Cannot I work as well for you just as I am?"

"Perhaps; perhaps not," said the other, easily. "But you perceive, further, that the fact of our not exacting subscriptions from the poorer members of our association makes it all the more necessary that we should have voluntary gifts from the richer. And as regards a surplus of wealth, of what use is that to any one? Am I not granted as much money as one need reasonably want? And just now there is more than ever a need of money for the general purposes of the Society:

Lord Evelyn gave us a thousand pounds last week."

Brand flushed red.

"I wish you had told me," he said; "I would rather have given you five thousand. You know he cannot afford it."

"The greater the merit of the sacrifice," said his companion, calmly.

This proposal was so audacious that George Brand was still a little bewildered; but the fact was that, while listening very respectfully to Mr. Lind, he had been thinking more about Natalie; and it was the most natural thing in the world that some thought of her should now intervene.

"Another thing, Mr. Lind," said he, though he was rather embarrassed. "Even if I were to make such a sacrifice, as far as I am concerned; if I were to run the risk for myself alone, that might be all very well; but supposing that I were to marry, do you think I should like my wife to run such a risk—do you think I should be justified in allowing her? And surely *you* ought not to ask *me*. It is your own daughter——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Brand," said the other, blandly but firmly. "We will restrict ourselves to business at the present moment, if you will be so kind. I wrote to you all that occurred to me when I had to consider your very flattering proposal with regard to my daughter; I may now add that if any thought of her interfered with your decision in this matter, I should still further regret that you had ever met."

"You do not take the view a father would naturally take about the future of his own daughter," said Brand, bluntly.

Lind was not in the least moved by this taunt.

"I should allow neither the interests of my daughter nor my own interests to interfere with my sense of duty," said he. "Do you know me so little? Do you know her so little? Ah, then you have much to learn of her!"

Lind looked at him for a second or two, and added, with a slight smile—

"If you decide to say no, be sure I will not say a word of it to her. No: I will still leave the child her hero in her imagination. For when I said to her, 'Natalie, an Englishman will do a good deal for the good of the people—he will

give you his sympathy, his advice, his time, his labour—but he will not put his hand in his pocket;' then she said, 'Ah, but you do not understand Mr. Brand yet, papa; he is with us; he is not one to go back.'"

"But this abandonment of one's property is so disproportionate in different cases——"

"The greater the sacrifice, the greater the merit," returned the other: then he immediately added, "But do not imagine I am seeking to persuade you. I place before you the condition on which you may go forward and attain the highest rank, ultimately perhaps the greatest power, in this organization. Ah, you do not understand what that is as yet. If you knew, you would not hesitate very long, I think."

"But—but suppose I have no great ambition," Brand remonstrated. "Suppose I am quite content to go on doing what I can in my present sphere?"

"You have already sworn to do your utmost, in every direction. On this one point of money, however, the various Councils have never departed from the principle that there must be no compulsion. On any other point the Council orders;

you obey. On this point the voluntary sacrifice has, as I say, all the more merit; and it is not forgotten. For what are you doing? You are yielding up a superabundance that you cannot use, so that thousands and thousands of the poor throughout the world may not be called on to contribute their pence. You are giving the final proof of your devotion. You are taking the vow of poverty and dependence, which many of the noblest brotherhoods the world has seen have exacted from their members at the very outset; but in your case with the difference that you can absolutely trust to the resources of an immense association——"

"Yes, as far as I am concerned," Brand said, quickly. "But I ask you whether I should be justified in throwing away this power to protect others. May I appeal to Natalie herself? May I ask her?"

"I am afraid, Mr. Brand," said the other, with the same mild firmness; "I must request you in the mean time to leave Natalie out of consideration altogether. This is a question of duty, of principle; it must regulate our future relations with each other; pray let it stand by itself."

Brand sat silent for a time. There were many things to think over. He recalled, for example, though vaguely, a conversation he had once had with Lord Evelyn, in which this very question of money was discussed; and in which he had said that he would above all things make sure he was not being duped. Moreover, he had intended that his property, in the event of his dying unmarried, should go to his nephews. But it was not his sister's boys who were now uppermost in his mind.

He rose.

"You cannot expect me to give you a definite answer at once," he said, almost absently.

"No. But before you go, let me add this," said the other, regarding his companion with a watchful look. "The Council are not only in urgent need of liberal funds just now, but also, in several directions, of diligent and exceptional service. The money contribution which they demand from England I shall be able to meet somehow, no doubt; hitherto I have not failed them. The claim for service shall not find us wanting either, I hope; and it has been represented to me that perhaps you ought to be trans-

ferred to Philadelphia, where there is much to be done at the present moment."

This suggestion effectually woke Brand from his day-dream.

"Philadelphia?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said the other, speaking very slowly, as if anxious that every word should have weight. "My visit, short as it was, enabled me to see how well one might employ one's whole lifetime there—with such results as would astonish our good friends at head-quarters, I am sure of that. True, the parting from one's country might be a little painful at first; but that is not the greatest of the sacrifices that one should be prepared to submit to. However," he added, rather more lightly, "this is still to be decided on; meanwhile I hope, and I am sure you hope too, Mr. Brand, that I shall be able to satisfy the Council that the English section does not draw back when called on for its services."

"No doubt—no doubt," Brand said; but the pointed way in which his companion had spoken did not escape him, and promised to afford him still further food for reflection.

But if this was a threat, he would show no fear.

"Molyneux wishes to get back north as soon as possible," he said, in a matter-of-fact way, just as if they had been talking of commonplace affairs the whole time. "I suppose his initiation could take place to-morrow night?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Lind, following his visitor to the door. "And you must allow me to thank you once more, my dear Mr. Brand, for your service in securing to us such an ally. I should like to have talked with you about your experiences in the north; but you agree with me that the suggestion I have made demands your serious consideration first—is it not so?"

Brand nodded.

"I will let you know to-morrow," said he. "Good morning!"

"Good morning!" said Mr. Lind, pleasantly; and then the door was shut.

He was attended downstairs by the stout old German, who, on reaching the front door, drew forth a letter from his pocket, and handed it to him with much pretence of mystery. He was thinking of other things, to tell the truth; and as he walked along he regarded the outside of the envelope with but little curiosity. It was

addressed, "*All' Egregio Signore, Il Signor G. Brand.*"

"No doubt a begging letter from some Leicester Square fellow," he thought.

Presently, however, he opened the letter, and read the following message, which was also in Italian:—

"*The beautiful caged little bird sighs and weeps, because she thinks she is forgotten. A word of remembrance would be kind, if her friend is discreet and secret. Above all, no open strife! This from one who departs. Farewell!*"

CHAPTER V.

A FRIEND'S ADVICE.

This must be said for George Brand, that while he was hard and unsympathetic in the presence of those whom he disliked or distrusted, in the society of those whom he did like and did trust he was docile and acquiescent as a child, easily led and easily persuaded. When he went from Lind's chamber, which had been to him full of an atmosphere of impatience and antagonism, to Lord Evelyn's study, and found his friend sitting reading there, his whole attitude changed. And his first duty was to utter a series of remonstrances about the thousand pounds.

"You can't afford it, Evelyn. Why didn't you come to me? I would have given it to you a dozen times over rather than you should have paid it."

"No doubt you would," said the pale lad. "That is why I did not come to you."

"I wish you could get it back."

"I would not take it back. It is little enough I can do; why not let me give such help as I can? If only those girls would begin to marry off, I might do more. But there is such a band of them that men are afraid to come near them."

"I think it would be a pity to spoil the group," said Brand. "The country should subscribe to keep them as they are—the perfect picture of an English family. However, to return: you must promise me not to commit any of these extravagances again. If any appeal is made to you, come to me."

But here a thought seemed to strike him.

"Ah," he said, "I have something to tell you. Lind is trying to get me to enter the same grade of officership with himself. And do you know what the first qualification is?—that you give up every penny you possess in the world."

"Well?"

"Well!"

The two friends stared at each other—the one calmly inquisitive, the other astounded.

"I thought you would have burst out laughing!" Brand exclaimed.

"Why?" said the other. "You have already done more for them—for us—than that: why should you not do all in your power? Why should you not do all that you can, and while you can? Look!"

They were standing at the window. On the other side of the street, far below them, were some funeral carriages; at this precise moment the coffin was being carried across the pavement.

"That is the end of it. I say why shouldn't you do all that you can, and while you can?"

"Do you want reasons? Well, one has occurred to me since I came into this room. A minute ago I said to you that you must not repeat that extravagance; and I said if you were appealed to again you could come to me. But what if I had already surrendered every penny in the world? I wish to retain in my own hands at least the power to help my friends."

"That is only another form of selfishness,"

said Lord Evelyn, laughing. "I fear you are as yet of weak faith, Brand."

He turned from the light and went and sank into the shadow of a great arm-chair.

"Now I know what you are going to do, Evelyn," said his friend. "You are going to talk me out of my common-sense. And I will not have it. I want to show you why it is impossible I should agree to this demand."

"If you feel it to be impossible, it is impossible."

"My dear fellow, is it reasonable?"

"I dislike things that are reasonable."

"There is but one way of getting at you. Have you thought of Natalie?"

"Ah!" said the other, quickly raising himself into an expectant attitude.

"You will listen now, I suppose, to reason, to common-sense. Do you think it likely that, with the possibility of her becoming my wife, I am going to throw away this certainty and leave her to all the chances of the world? Lind says that the Society amply provides for its officers. Very well; that is quite probable. I tell him that I am not afraid for myself; if I had to

think of myself alone, there is no saying what I might not do, even if I were to laugh at myself for doing it. But how about Natalie? Lind might die. I might be sent away to the ends of the earth. Do you think I am going to leave her at the mercy of a lot of people whom she never saw!"

Lord Evelyn was silent.

"Besides, there is more than that," his friend continued, warmly. "You may call it selfishness, if you like, but if you love a woman and she gives her life into your hands—well, she has the first claim on you. I will put it to you: do you think I am going to sell the Beeches—when—when she might live there?"

Lord Evelyn did not answer.

"Of course I am willing to subscribe largely," his friend continued; "and Natalie herself would say yes to that. But I am not ambitious. I don't want to enter that grade. I don't want to sit in Lind's chair, when he gets elected to the Council, as has been suggested to me. I am not qualified for it; I don't care about it; I can best do my own work in my own way."

At last Lord Evelyn spoke; but it was in a meditative fashion; and not very much to the point. He lay back in his easy-chair, his hands clasped behind his head, and talked; and his talk was not at all about the selling of Hill Beeches in Buckinghamshire, but of much more abstract matters. He spoke of the divine wrath of the reformer—what a curious thing it was, that fiery impatience with what was wrong in the world; how it cropped up here and there from time to time; and how one abuse after another had been burned up by it and swept away for ever. Give the man possessed of this holy rage all the beauty and wealth and ease in the world, and he is not satisfied; there is something within him that vibrates to the call of humanity without; others can pass by what does not affect themselves with a laugh or a shrug of indifference; he only must stay and labour till the wrong thing is put right. And how often had he been jeered at by the vulgar of his time; how Common-Sense had pointed the finger of scorn at him; how Respectability had called him crazed! John Brown at Harper's Ferry is only a ridiculous old fool; his effort is absurd; even

gentlemen in the North feel an "intellectual satisfaction" that he is hanged, because of his "preposterous miscalculation of possibilities." Yes; no doubt; you hang him, and there is an end; but "his soul goes marching on;" and the slaves are freed! You want to abolish the Corn Laws?—all good society shrieks at you at first: you are a Radical, a regicide, a Judas Iscariot; but in time the nation listens; and the poor have cheap bread. "Mazzini is mad!" the world cries: "why this useless bloodshed? It is only political murder." Mazzini is mad, no doubt; but in time the beautiful dream of Italy—of "Italia, the world's wonder, the world's care"—comes true. And what matter to the reformer, the agitator, the dreamer, though you stone him to death, or throw him to the lions, or clap him into a nineteenth-century prison and shut his mouth that way? He has handed on the sacred fire. Others will bear the torch; and he who is unencumbered will outstrip his fellows. The wrong must be put right.

And so forth; and so forth. Brand sat and listened; recognizing here and there a proud, pathetic phrase of Natalie's, and knowing well

whence the inspiration came; and as he listened he almost felt as though that beautiful old place in Buckinghamshire was slipping through his fingers. The sacrifice seemed to be becoming less and less of a sacrifice; it took more and more the form of a duty: would Natalie's eyes smile approval?

Brand jumped up; and took a rapid turn or two up and down the room.

"I won't listen to you, Evelyn. You don't know anything about money matters. You care for nothing but ideas. Now, I come of a commercial stock; and I want to know what guarantee I have that this money, if I were to give it up, would be properly applied. Lind's assurances are all very well——"

"Oh yes, of course; you have got back to Lind," said Lord Evelyn, waking up from his reveries. "Do you know, my dear fellow, that your distrust of Lind is rapidly developing into a sharp and profound hatred?"

"I take men as I find them. Perhaps you can explain to me how Lind should care so little for the future of his daughter as to propose ——with the possibility of our marrying—that she should be left penniless?"

"I can explain it to myself; but not to you; you are too thorough an Englishman."

"Are you a foreigner?"

"I try to understand those who are not English. Now, an Englishman's theory is that he himself, and his wife, and children—his domestic circle, in fact—are the centre of creation; and that the fate of empires, as he finds that going one way or the other in the telegrams of the morning paper, is a very small matter compared with the necessity of Tom's going to Eton, or Dick's marrying and settling down as the bailiff of the Worcestershire farm. That is all very well; but other people may be of a different habit of mind. Lind's heart and soul are in his present work; he would sacrifice himself, his daughter, you, or anybody else, to it, and consider himself amply justified. He does not care about money, or horses, or the luxury of a big establishment; I suppose he has had to live on simple fare many a time whether he liked it or not; and can put up with whatever happens. If you imagine that you may be cheated by a portion of your money—supposing you were to adopt his proposal—going

into his pocket as commission you do him a wrong."

"No, I don't think that," Brand said, rather unwillingly. "I don't take him to be a common and vulgar swindler. And I can very well believe that he does not care very much for money or luxury or that kind of thing so far as he himself is concerned. Still you would think that the ordinary instinct of a father would prevent his doing an injury to the future of his daughter——"

"Would he consider it an injury? Would she?"

"Well," Brand said, "she is very enthusiastic, and noble, and generous; and does not know what dependence or poverty means. But he is a man of the world; and you would think he would look after his own kith and kin."

"Yes, that is a wholesome conservative English sentiment; but it does not rule the actions of everybody."

"But common-sense——"

"Oh, bother common-sense! Common-sense is only a grocer, that hasn't got an idea beyond ham and eggs."

"Well, if I am only a grocer," Brand said,

quite submissively. "Don't you think the grocer, if he were asked to pay off the National Debt, ought to say, 'Gentlemen, that is a praiseworthy object. But in the mean time wouldn't it be advisable for me to make sure that my wife mayn't have to go on the parish?'"

Thereafter there was silence for a time; and when Brand next spoke it was in a certain precise, hard fashion, as if he wished to make his meaning very clear.

"Suppose, Evelyn," he said, "I were to tell you what has occurred to me as the probable explanation of Lind's indifference about the future of his daughter: would you be surprised?"

"I expect it will be wrong; for you cannot do justice to that man. But I should like to hear it."

"I must tell you he wrote me a letter, a shilly-shallying sort of letter, filled with arguments to prove that a marriage between Natalie and myself would not be expedient, and all the rest of it. Not absolutely refusing his consent, you understand; but postponing the matter; and hoping that on further reflection—etcetera, etcetera. Well, do you know what my con-

clusion is?—that he is definitely resolved I shall not marry his daughter; and that he is playing with me, humbugging me with the possibility of marrying her, until he induces me to hand him over my fortune for the use of the Society. Stare away as you like; that is what I believe to be true."

He rose and walked to the window, and looked out.

"Well, Evelyn, whatever happens, I have to thank you for many things. It has been all like my boyhood come back again; but much more wonderful and beautiful. If I have to go to America, I shall take with me at least the memory of one night at Covent Garden. She was there—and Madame Potecki—and old Calabressa. It was *Fidelio* they were playing. She gave me some forget-me-nots."

"What do you mean by going to America?" Lord Evelyn said.

Brand remained at the window for a minute or two, silent; and then he returned to his chair.

"You will say I am unjust again. But unless I am incapable of understanding English—such English as he speaks—this is his ultimatum: that

unless I give my property, every cent of it, over to the Society, I am to go to America. It is a distinct and positive threat."

"How can you say so!" the other remonstrated. "He has just been to America himself, without any compulsion whatever."

"He has been to America for a certain number of weeks. I am to go for life—and, as he imagines, alone."

His face had been growing darker and darker; the brows lowering ominously over the eyes.

"Now, Brand," his friend said, "you are letting your distrust of this man Lind become a madness. What if he were to say to-morrow that you might marry Natalie the day after?"

The other looked up, almost bewildered.

"I would say he was serving some purpose of his own. But he will not say that. He means to keep his daughter to himself; and he means to have my money."

"Why, you admitted a minute ago that even you could not suspect him of that!"

"Not for himself. No. Probably he does not care for money. But he cares for ambition—for power; and there is a vacancy in the Council.

Don't you see? This would be a tremendous large sum in the eyes of a lot of foreigners: they would be grateful, would they not? And Natalie once transferred to Italy, I could console myself with the honour and dignity of Lind's chair in Lisle Street: don't you perceive?"

"I perceive this—that you misjudge Lind altogether. I am sure of it. I have seen it from the beginning—from the moment you set your foot in his house. And you tried to blind yourself to the fact because of Natalie. Now that you imagine he means to take Natalie from you, all your pent-up antagonism breaks loose. Meanwhile, what does Natalie herself say?"

"What does she say?" he repeated, mechanically. He also was lying back in his chair; his eyes gazing aimlessly at the window. But whenever any one spoke of Natalie, or whenever he himself had to speak of her, a quite new expression came into his face. The brows lifted; the eyes were gentle. "What does she say? Why, nothing. Lind requested me neither to see her nor to write to her; and I thought that reasonable until I should have heard what he had to say to me. There is a message I got half an hour ago—not from her."

He handed to Lord Evelyn the anonymous scroll that he had received from the old German.

"Poor old Calabressa!" he said. "Those Italians are always very fond of little mysteries. But how he must have loved that woman!"

"Natalie's mother?"

"Yes," said the other, absently. "I wonder he has never gone to see his sweetheart of former years."

"What do you mean?"

Brand started. It was not necessary that Lord Evelyn should in the mean time be entrusted with that secret.

"He told me that when he saw Natalie it was to him like a vision from the dead; she was so like her mother. But I must be off, Evelyn; I have to meet Molyneux at two. So that is your advice," he said, as he went to the door—"that I should comply with Lind's demand; or—to put it another way—succumb to his threat?"

"It is not my advice at all. Quite the contrary. I say, if you have any doubt or distrust—if you cannot make the sacrifice without perfect faith and satisfaction to yourself—do not think of it."

"And go to America?"

"I cannot believe that any such compulsory alternative exists. But about Natalie: surely you will send her a message: Lind cannot object to that?"

"I will send her no message; I will go to her," the other said, firmly. "I believe Lind wishes me not to see her. Within the duties demanded of me by the Society, his wishes are to me commands; elsewhere and otherwise neither his wishes nor his commands do I value more than a lucifer-match. Is that plain enough, Evelyn?"

And so he went away, forgetting all the sage counsel Calabressa had given him; thinking rather of the kindly, thoughtful, mysterious little message the old man had left behind him, and of the beautiful caged bird that sighed and wept because she thought she was forgotten. She should not think that long!

CHAPTER VI.

A PROMISE.

THIS was a dark time indeed for Natalie Lind—left entirely by herself, ignorant of what was happening around her, and haunted by vague alarms. But the girl was too proud to show to any one how much she suffered. On the contrary, she reasoned and remonstrated with herself; and forced herself to assume an attitude of something more than resignation, of resolution. If it was necessary that her father should be obeyed; that her lover should maintain this cruel silence; even that he and she should have the wide Atlantic separate them for ever, she would not repine. It was not for her, who had so often appealed to others, to shrink from sacrifice herself. And if this strange new hope that had filled her heart for a time had to be finally abandoned, what of that? What mattered a

single life? She had the larger hope; there was another and greater future for her to think about; and she could cherish the thought that she at least had done nothing to imperil or diminish the work to which so many of her friends had given their lives.

But silence is hard to bear. Ever since the scene with her father, a certain undeclared estrangement had prevailed between these two; and no reference whatsoever had been made to George Brand. Her lover had sent her no message; no word of encouragement, of assurance, or sympathy. Even Calabressa had gone. There remained to her only the portrait that Calabressa had given her; and in the solitude of her own room many a time she sat and gazed at the beautiful face with some dim, wondering belief that she was looking at her other self, and that she could read into the features some portion of her own experiences, her own joys and sorrows. For surely those soft, dark, liquid eyes must have loved and been beloved? And had they too filled with gladness when a certain step had been heard coming near; and had they looked up with trust and

pride and tenderness; and filled with tears again in absence, when only the memory of loving words remained? She recalled many a time what Calabressa had said to her—"My child, may Heaven keep you as true and brave as your mother was; and send you more happiness." Her mother, then, had not been happy? But she was brave, Calabressa had said: when she loved a man, would she not show herself worthy of her love?

This was all very well; but in spite of her reasoning and her forced courage, and her self-possession in the presence of others, Natalie had got into the habit of crying in the quietude of her own room, to the great distress of the little Anneli who had surprised her once or twice. And the rosy-cheeked German maid guessed pretty accurately what had happened; and wondered very much at the conduct of English lovers, who allowed their sweethearts to pine and fret in solitude without sending them letters or coming to see them. But on this particular afternoon Anneli opened the door in answer to a summons; and found outside a club commissionaire whom she had seen once or twice before; and when

he gave her a letter—addressed in a handwriting which she recognized—and asked for an answer—she was as much agitated as if it had come from her own sweetheart in Görlitz. She snatched it from the man, as if she feared he would take it back. She flew with it upstairs, breathless. She forgot to knock at the door.

"Oh, Fräulein, it is a letter," said she, in great excitement, "and there is to be an answer——"

Then she hesitated. But the good sense of the child told her she ought to go.

"I will wait outside, Fräulein. Will you ring when you have written the answer?"

When Natalie opened the letter she was outwardly quite calm—a little pale, perhaps: but as she read it, her heart beat fast. And it was her heart that instantly dictated the answer to this brief and simple appeal—

"My Natalie,

"It is your father's wish that I should not see you. Is it your wish also? There is something I would like to say to you."

It was her heart that answered. She rose

directly. She never thought twice, or even once, about any wish, or menace, or possible consequence. She went straight to her desk, and with a shaking hand wrote these lines—

"My Own,

"Come to me, now, at any time—when you please. Am I not yours?

"Natalie."

Despite herself, she had to pause, to steady her hand—and because her heart was beating so fast that she felt choked—before she could properly address the envelope. Then she carried the letter to Anneli, who she knew was waiting outside. That done, she shut herself in again, to give herself time to think, though in truth she could scarcely think at all. For all sorts of emotions were struggling for the mastery of her—joy and a proud resolve distinctly predominant. It was done; and she would abide by it. She was not given to fear.

But she tried hard to think. At last her lover was coming to her; he would ask her what she was prepared to do: what would she answer?

Then again the joy of the thought that she

was about to see him drove every other consideration out of her mind. How soon might he be here? Hurriedly she went to a jar of flowers on the table; chose some scarlet geraniums; and turned to a mirror. Her haste did not avail much; for her fingers were still trembling. But that was the colour he had said on one occasion suited her best. She had not been wearing flowers in her hair of late.

From time to time, for a second or so, some thought of her father intervened. But then her father had only enjoined her to dismiss for ever the hope of her marrying the man to whom she had given her heart and her life: that could not prevent her loving him, and seeing him, and telling him that her love was his. She wished the geraniums were less rose-red and more scarlet in hue. It was the scarlet he had approved of —that evening that he and she and the little Polish lady had dined together.

She had not long to wait. With a quick, intense consciousness she heard the Hansom drive up, and the rapid knock that followed; her heart throbbed through the seconds of silence; then she knew that he was ascending the stair;

then it seemed to her as if the life would go out of her altogether. But when he flung the door open and came towards her; when he caught her two hands in his—one hand in each hand—and held them tight; when, in a silence that neither cared to break, he gazed into her rapidly moistening eyes, then the full tide of joy and courage returned to her heart; and she was proud that she had sent him that answer. For some seconds—to be remembered during a lifetime—they regarded each other in silence; then he released her hands, and began to put back the hair from her forehead as if he would see more clearly into the troubled deeps of her eyes; and then, somehow—perhaps to hide her crying—she buried her face in his breast, and his arms were around her, and she was sobbing out all the story of her waiting and her despair.

"What!" said he, cheerfully, to calm and reassure her, "the brave Natalie, to be frightened like that!"

"I was alone," she murmured. "I had no one to speak to; and I could not understand. Oh, my love, my love, you do not know what you are to me!"

He kissed her; her cheeks were wet.

"Natalie," said he, in a low voice, "don't forget this: we may be separated—that is possible—I don't know. But if we live fifty years apart from each other—if you never hear one word more from me or of me—be sure of this, that I am thinking of you, always, and loving you, as I do at this moment when my arms are around you. Will you remember that: will you believe that—always?"

"I could not think otherwise," she answered. "But now that you are with me—that I can hear you speak to me——" And at this point her voice failed her altogether; and he could only draw her closer to him, and soothe and caress her, and stroke the raven-black hair, that had never before thrilled his fingers with its soft, strange touch.

"Perhaps," she said at last, in a broken and hesitating voice, "you will blame me for having said what I have said. I have had no girl-companions; scarcely any woman to tell me what I should do and say. But—but—I thought you were going to America—I thought I should never see you again—I was lonely and miserable—and when I saw you again—how could I help saying

I was glad ? How could I help saying that, and more ?—for I never knew it till now : oh, my love, do you know that you have become the whole world to me ? When you are away from me, I would rather die than live."

"Natalie, my life !"

"I must say that to you—once—that you may understand—if we should never see each other again. And now——"

She gently released herself from his embrace ; and went and sat down by the table. He took a chair near her, and held her hand. She would not look up ; for her eyes were still wet with tears.

"And now," she said, making a great effort to regain her self-control, "you must tell me about yourself. A woman may have her feelings and fancies ; and cry over them when she is afraid or alone ; that is nothing ; it is the way of the world. It is a man's fate that is of importance."

"You must not talk like that, Natalie," said he, gravely. "Our fate is one. Without you, I don't value my life more than this bit of geranium-leaf ; with you, life would be worth having."

"And you must not talk like that either,"

she said. "Your life is valuable to others. Ah, my dear friend, that is what I have been trying to console myself with of late. I said, 'Well, if he goes away and does not see me again, will he not be freer? He has a great work to do; he may have to go away from England for many years; why should he be encumbered with a wife?"

"It was your father, I presume, who made those suggestions to you?" said Brand, regarding her.

"Yes; papa said something like that," she answered, quite innocently. "That is what would naturally occur to him; his work has always the first place in his thoughts. And with you, too; is it not so?"

"No."

She looked up quickly.

"I will be quite frank with you, Natalie. You have the first place in my thoughts; I hope you ever will have, while I am a living man. But cannot I give the Society all the work that is in me equally well, whether I love you or whether I don't, whether you become my wife or whether you do not? I have no doubt your

father has been talking to you as he has been talking to me."

She placed her disengaged hand on the top of his, and said gently—

"My father perhaps does not quite understand you; perhaps he is too anxious. I, for one, am not anxious—about *that*. Do you know how I trust you, my dearest of friends? Sometimes I have said to myself, 'I will ask him for a pledge. I will say to him that he must promise, that he must swear to me, that whatever happens as between him and me, nothing, nothing, nothing in all the world will induce him to give up what he has undertaken;' but then again I have said to myself, 'No, I can trust him for that.'"

"I think you may, Natalie," said he, rather absently. "And yet what could have led me to join such a movement but your own noble spirit—the glamour of your voice—the thanks of your eyes? You put madness into my blood with your singing."

"Do you call it madness?" she said, with a faint flush in the pale olive face. "Is it not rather kindness—is it not justice to others—the desire to help—something that the angels in heaven

must feel when they look down and see what a great misery there is in the world?"

"I think you are an angel yourself, Natalie," said he, quite simply, "and that you have come down and got among a lot of people who don't treat you too well. However, we must come to the present moment. You spoke of America: now, what do you know about that?"

The abrupt question startled her. She had been so overjoyed to see him—her whole soul was so buoyant and radiant with happiness—that she had quite forgotten or dismissed the vague fears that had been of late besetting her. But she proceeded to tell him, with a little hesitation here and there, and with a considerable smoothing down of phrases, what her father had said to her. She tried to make it appear quite reasonable. And all she prayed for was that, if he were sent away to America, if they had to part for many years, or for ever, she should be permitted to say good-bye to him.

"We are not parted yet," said Brand, briefly.

The fact was he had just got a new key to the situation. So that threat about America could serve a double purpose? He was now

more than ever convinced that Ferdinand Lind was merely playing off and on with him until this money question should be settled; and that he had been resolved all the time that his daughter should not marry. He was beginning to understand.

"Natalie," said he, slowly, "I told you I had something to say to you. You know your father wrote to me in the North, asking me neither to see you nor to write to you until some matter between him and me was settled. Well, I respected his wish until I should know what the thing was. Now that I do know, it seems to me that you are as much concerned as any one; and that it is not reasonable, it is not possible, I should refrain from seeing you and consulting you."

"No one shall prevent your seeing me, when it is your wish," said the girl, in a low voice.

"This, then, is the point: you know enough about the Society to understand; and there is no particular secret. Your father wishes me to enter the higher grade of officers, under the Council; and the first condition is that one surrenders up every farthing of one's property."

"Yes?"

He stared at her. Her "Yes?"—with its affectionate interest, and its absolute absence of surprise—was almost the exact equivalent of Lord Evelyn's "Well?"

"Perhaps you would advise me to consent?" he said, almost in the way of a challenge.

"Ah, no," she said, with a smile. "It is not for me to advise on such things. What you decide for yourself, that will be right."

"But you don't understand, my darling. Supposing I were ambitious of getting higher office, which I am not; supposing I were myself willing to sell my property to swell the funds of the Society—and I don't think I should be willing in any case; do you think I would part with what ought to belong to my wife—to you, Natalie? Do you think I would have you marry a beggar—one dependent on the indulgence of people unknown to him?"

And now there was a look of real alarm on the girl's face.

"Ah!" she said, quickly. "Is not that what my father feared? You are thinking of me when you should think of others. Already

I — I — interfere with your duty — I tempt you——"

"My darling, be calm, be reasonable. There is no duty in the matter; your father acknowledges that himself. It is a proposal I am free to accept or reject, as I please; and now I promise you that, as you won't give me any advice, I shall decide without thinking of you at all. Will that satisfy you?"

She remained silent for a second or two; and then she said, thoughtfully—

"Perhaps you could decide just as if there were no possibility of my ever being your wife?"

"To please you, I will assume that, too."

Then she said, after a bit—

"One word more, dearest; you must grant me this—that I may always be able to think of it when I am alone and far from you; and be able to reassure myself. It is the promise I thought I could do so well without. Now you will give it me?"

"What promise?"

"That whatever happens to you or to me, whatever my father demands of me, and wherever

you may have to go, you will never withdraw from what you have undertaken?"

He met the earnest pleading look of those beautiful eyes without flinching. His heart was light enough so far as such a promise was concerned. Heavier oaths than that lay on him.

"That is simple enough, Natalie," said he. "I promise you distinctly that nothing shall cause me to swerve from my allegiance to the Society; I will give absolute and implicit obedience; and the best of such work as I can do. But they must not ask me to forget my Natalie."

She rose—still holding his hand—and stood by him, so that he could not quite see her face. Then she said, in a very low voice indeed—

"Dearest, may I give you a ring?—you do not wear one at all——"

"But surely, Natalie, it is for me to choose a ring for you?"

"Ah, it is not that I mean," she said, quickly; and with her face flushing. "It is a ring that will remind you of the promise you have given me to-day—when we may not be able to see each other."

CHAPTER VII.

KIRSKI.

To this pale student from the Reading Room of the British Museum, as he stands on a bridge crossing one of the smaller canals, surely the scene around him must seem one fitted to gladden the heart. For it is Venice at mid-day, in glowing sunlight: the warm cream-white fronts of the marble palaces and casemented houses, the tall campanili with their golden tips, the vast and glittering domes of the churches, all rising fair and dream-like into the intense dark blue of a cloudless sky. How the hot sunlight brings out all the beautiful colour of the place—the richly laden fruit-stalls in the Riva dei Schiavoni; the russet and saffron sails of the vessels; the canal-boats coming in to the steps with huge open tuns of purple wine to be ladled out with copper buckets; and then all around

the shining twinkling plain of the sea, catching here and there a reflection from the softly red walls of San Giorgio and the steel-grey gleaming domes of Santa Maria della Salute.

Then the passers-by: these are not like the dusky ghosts that wander through the pale-blue mists of Bloomsbury. Here comes a buxom water-carrier, in her orange petticoat and sage-green shawl, who has the two copper cans at the end of the long piece of wood poised on her shoulders pretty nearly filled to the brim. Then a couple of the gayer gondoliers in white and blue, with fancy waist-belts, and rings in their ears. A procession of black-garbed monks wends slowly along; they have come from the silence of the Armenian convent over there at the horizon. Some wandering minstrels shoot their gondola into the mouth of the canal; and strike up a gay waltz; while they watch the shaded balconies above. Here is a lascar ashore from the big steamer that is to start for Alexandria on the morrow. A company of soldiers, with blue coats, canvas trousers, and white gaiters, half march and half trot along to the quick crackling

music of the buglers. A swarthy-visaged maiden, with the calm brow of a Madonna, appears in the twilight of a balcony, with a packet of maize in her hand, and in a minute or two she is surrounded with a cloud of pigeons. Then this beggar—a child of eight or ten—red-haired and blue-eyed: surely she has stepped out of one of Titian's pictures? She whines and whimpers her prayer to him; but there is something in her look that he has seen elsewhere. It belongs to another century.

From these reveries Mr. Gathorne Edwards was aroused by some one tapping him on the shoulder. It was Calabressa.

"My dear Monsieur Edouarts," said he, in a low voice—for the red-haired little beggar was still standing there expectant—"he has gone over to the shipping-place. We must follow later on. Meanwhile, regard this letter that has just been forwarded to me. Ah, you English do not forget your promises."

Edwards threw a piece of money to the child, who passed on. Then he took the letter; and read it. It was in French.

"DEAR CALABRESSA,

"I want you to tell me what you have done with Yakov Kirski. They seem unwilling to say here; and I do not choose to inquire further. But I undertook to look after him; and I understood he was getting on very well; and now you have carried him off. I hope it is with no intention of allowing him to go back to Russia, where he will simply make an attempt at murder, and fall into the hands of the police. Do not let the poor devil go and make a fool of himself. If you want money to send him back to England, show this letter or forward it to Messrs. ——, who will give you what you want.

"Your friend,

"GEORGE BRAND.

"P.S.—I have seen your beautiful caged little bird. I can say no more at present; but that she shall not suffer through any neglect of mine."

"What is that about the caged bird?" said Edwards.

"Ah, the caged bird?" said Calabressa. "The caged bird?—do you see, that is a metaphor. It is nothing; one makes one's little

joke. But I was saying, my dear friend, that you English do not promise, and then forget. No; he says, 'I will befriend this poor devil of a Kirski;' and here he comes enquiring after him. Now I must answer the letter; you will accompany me, Monsieur Edouarts? Ten minutes in my little room; and it is done."

So the two walked away together. This Edwards who now accompanied Calabressa was a man of about thirty, who looked younger; tall, fair, with a slight stoop, a large forehead, and blue eyes that stared near-sightedly through spectacles. The ordinary expression of his face was grave even to melancholy; but his occasional smile was humorous; and when he laughed the laugh was soft and light like that of a child. His knowledge of modern languages was considered to be almost unrivalled; though he had travelled but little.

When, in this little room, Calabressa had at length finished his letter, and dusted it over with sand, he was not at all loth to show it to this master of modern speech. Calabressa was proud of his French; and if he would himself have acknowledged that it was perhaps here and

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there of doubtful idiom and of phonetic spelling, would he not have claimed for it that it was fluent, incisive, and ornate?

"My valued friend, it is not permitted me to answer your questions in precise terms; but he to whom you have had the goodness to extend your bountiful protection is well and safe, and under my own care. No; he goes not back to Russia. His thoughts are different; his madness travels in other directions; it is no longer revenge, it is adoration and gratitude that his heart holds. And you, can you not guess who has worked the miracle? Think of this: you have a poor wretch who is distracted by injuries and suffering; he goes away alone into Europe; he is buffeted about with the winds of hunger and thirst and cold; he cannot speak; he is like a dog—a wild beast that people drive away from their door. And all at once some one addresses him in gentle tones: it is the voice of an angel to him! You plough and harrow the poor wretch's heart with suffering and contempt and hopelessness; until it is a desert, a wilderness; but some one, by accident one day, drops a seed of kindness into it, and behold! the beautiful

flower of love springing up, and all the man's life going into it! Can you understand—you who ought to understand? Were you not present, when the bewildered, starved, hunted creature heard that gentle voice of pity, like an angel speaking from heaven? And if the beautiful girl, who will be the idol of my thoughts through my remaining years, if she does not know that she has rescued a human soul from despair, you will tell her—tell her from me, from Calabressa. What would not Kirski do for her, you might well ask. The patient regards the physician who has cured him with gratitude: this is more than gratitude; it is worship. What she has preserved she owns; he would give his life to her, to you, to any one whom she regards with affection. For myself I do not say such things; but she may count on me also, while one has yet life.

"I am yours, and hers,

"CALABRESSA."

The letter was handed to Gathorne Edwards, with a proud air; and he read it, and handed it back.

"This man Kirski is not so much of a savage as you imagine," he said. "He learns quickly; and forgets nothing. He can repeat all the articles of membership; but it is No. 5 that he is particularly fond of. You have not heard him go over it, Calabressa?"

"I? No. He does not waste my time that way."

"His pronunciation," continued the younger man, with a smile, "is rather like the cracking of dry twigs. '*Article* 5. *Whatever punishment may be decreed against any Officer, Companion, or Friend of the Society may be vicariously borne by any other Officer, Companion, or Friend who of his own full and free consent acts as substitute; the original offender becoming thereby redeemed, acquitted, and released.*' And then he invariably adds: 'Why not make me of some use? To myself my life is nothing.'"

At this moment there was a tapping at the door.

"It is himself," said Edwards.

"Enter!" Calabressa called out.

The man who now came into the room was a very different-looking person from the wild un-

kempt creature who had confronted Natalie Lind in Curzon Street. The voluminous red beard and moustache had been cropped; he wore the clothes of a decent workman, with a foreign touch here and there; he was submissive and docile in look.

"Well, where have you been, my friend?" Calabressa said to him, in Italian.

Kirski glanced at Gathorne Edwards; and begun to speak to him in Russian.

"Will you explain for me, little father? I have been to many churches."

"The police will not suspect him if he goes there," said Calabressa, laughing.

"And to the shops in the Piazza San Marco where the pictures are of the saints."

"Well?"

"Little father, I can find no one of the saints so beautiful as that one in England that the master Calabressa knows."

Calabressa laughed again.

"Allons, mon grand enfant! Tell him that if it is only a likeness he is hunting for, I can show him one."

With that he took out from his breast-pocket

a small pocket-book; opened it; found a certain photograph; and put it on the table—shoving it over towards Kirski. The dim-eyed Russian did not dare to touch it; but he stooped over it; and he put one trembling hand on each side of it, as if he would concentrate the light; and gazed at this portrait of Natalie Lind until he could see nothing at all for the tears that came into his eyes. Then he rose abruptly; and said something rapidly to Edwards.

"He says, 'Take it away, or you will make me a thief. It is worth more than all the diamonds in the world.'"

Calabressa did not laugh this time. He regarded the man with a look in which there was quite as much pity as curiosity.

"The poor devil!" he said. "Tell him I will ask the beautiful saint whom he worships so to send him a portrait of herself with her own hands. I will. She will do as much as that for her friend Calabressa."

This had scarcely been translated to Kirski when in his sudden gratitude he caught Calabressa's hand and kissed it.

"Tell him, also," Calabressa said good-

naturedly, "that if he is hungry before dinner-time there is sausage and bread and beer in the cupboard. But he must not stir out till we come back. Allons, mon bon camarade!"

Calabressa lit another cigarette, and the two companions sallied forth. They stepped into a gondola; and presently they were being borne swiftly over the plain of light green water. By-and-by they plunged into a varied and picturesque mass of shipping, and touched land again in front of a series of stores. The gondola was ordered to await their return.

Calabressa passed without question through the lower floor of this particular building, where the people were busy with barrels of flour; and led the way upstairs until he stopped at a certain door. He knocked thrice, and entered. There was a small, dark man seated at a table, apparently engaged with some bills of lading.

"You are punctual, Brother Calabressa."

"Your time is valuable, Brother Granaglia. Let me present to you my comrade, Signor Edouarts, of whom I wrote to you."

The sallow-faced little man with the tired look bowed courteously; begged his guests to be

seated; and pushed towards them a box of cigarettes.

"Now, my Calabressa," said he, "to the point. As you guess, I am pressed for time. Seven days hence will find me in Moscow."

"In Moscow!" exclaimed Calabressa. "You dare not!"

Granaglia waved his hand a couple of inches.

"Do not protest. It may be your turn to-morrow. And my good friend Calabressa would find Moscow just about as dangerous for him as for me."

"Monsieur le Secretaire, I have no wish to try. But to the point, as you say. May one ask how it stands with Zaccatelli?"

Granaglia glanced at the Englishman.

"Of course he knows everything," Calabressa explained instantly. "How otherwise should I have brought him with me?"

"Well, Zaccatelli has received his warning."

"Who carried it?"

"I."

"You? You are the devil! You thrust your head into the lion's den?"

The black-eyed, worn-faced little man seemed

pleased. An odd dry smile appeared about the thin lips.

"It needed no courage at all, friend Calabressa. His Eminence knows who we are, no one better. The courage was his. It is not a pleasant thing when you are told that within a certain given time you will be a dead man; but Zaccatelli did not blanch; no, he was very polite to me. He paid us compliments. We were not like the others, Calabressa. We were good citizens and Christians; even his Holiness might be induced to lend an ear; why should not the Church and we be friends?"

Calabressa burst out laughing.

"Surely evil days have fallen on the Pope, Brother Granaglia, when one of his own Cardinals proposes that he should at last countenance a secret society. But his Eminence was mad with fear, was it not so? He wanted to win you over with promises, eh? Idle words, and no more. He feeds you on wind; and sends you away; and returns to his mistresses and his wines and his fountains of perfume?"

"Not quite so," said the other, with the same dry smile. "His Eminence, as I say to you,

knows as well as any one in Europe who and what we are, and what is our power. The day after I called on him with my little message, what does he do—of his own free will, mind you—but send back the daughter of old De Bedros to her home; with a pledge to her father that she shall have a dowry of ten thousand lire when she marries. The father is pleased; the daughter is not. She sits and cries. She talks of herself getting at him with a stiletto."

He took a cigarette; and accepted a light from Calabressa.

"Further," he continued, "his Eminence is so kind as to propose to give the Council an annual subsidy from his own purse of thirty thousand lire."

"Thirty thousand lire!" Calabressa exclaimed.

But at this point even Granaglia began to laugh.

"Yes, yes, my friend," he said, apparently apostrophizing the absent Cardinal. "You know, then, who we are; and you do not wish to give up all your pleasures. No; we are to become the good boy among secret societies; we are to have the blessing of the Pope; we are to fight

Prince Bismarck for you. Prince Bismarck has all his knights and his castles on the board; but what are they against an angelic host of bishops, and some millions of common pawns? Prince Bismarck wishes to plunge Europe again into war. The Church, with this tremendous engine within reach, says, No. Do you wish to find eight men—eight men, at the least—out of every company of every regiment in all your *corps d'armée* throw down their rifle at the first onset of battle? You will shoot them for mutiny? My dear fellow, you cannot; the enemy is upon you. With eight men out of each company throwing down their weapons and determined either to desert or die, how on earth can you fight at all? Well, then, good Bismarck, you had better make your peace with the Church, and rescind those Falk laws. What do you think of that scheme, Calabressa? It was ingenious, was it not, to have come into the head of a man under sentence of death?"

"But the thirty thousand lire, Brother Granaglia. It is a tremendous bribe."

"The Council does not accept bribes, Brother Calabressa," said the other, coldly.

"It is decided, then, that the decree remains to be executed?"

"I know of nothing to the contrary. But if you wish to know for certain, you must seek the Council. They are at Naples."

He pulled an ink-bottle before him; and made a motion with his fore-finger.

"You understand?"

"Yes, yes," Calabressa answered. "And I will go on to Naples, Brother Granaglia. For I have with me one who I think will carry out the wishes of the Council effectively so far as his Eminence the Cardinal is concerned."

"Who is he?" said the other; but with no great interest.

"Yakov Kirski. He is a Russian."

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLIMAX.

It was a momentous decision that George Brand had to arrive at; and yet he scarcely seemed to be aware of it. The man had changed so much during these past six months.

"Do you know, Evelyn," he was saying to his friend, on the very evening on which his answer was to be given to Ferdinand Lind, "I am beginning to look on that notion of my going to America with anything but dislike. Rather the opposite, indeed. I should like to get rid of a lot of old associations; and start in a new and wider field. With another life to lead, don't you want another sort of world to live it in?"

Lord Evelyn regarded him. No one had observed with a closer interest the gradual change that had come over this old friend of

his. And he was proud of it, too; for had it not been partly of his doing?

"One does not breathe free air here," Brand continued, rather absently—as if his mental vision was fixed on the greater spaces beyond the seas. "With a new sort of life beginning, wouldn't it be better to start it under new conditions—feeling yourself unhampered—with nothing around you to disturb even the foolishness of your dreams and hopes? Then you could work away at your best, leaving the result to time."

"I know perfectly what all that means," Lord Evelyn said. "You are anxious to get away from Lind. You believe in your work; but you don't like to be associated with him."

"Perhaps I know a little more than you, Evelyn," said Brand, gently, "of Lind's relation to the Society. He does not represent it to me at all. He is only one of its servants, like ourselves. But don't let us talk about him."

"You *must* talk about him," Lord Evelyn said, as he pulled out his watch. "It is now seven. At eight you go to the initiation of Molyneux; and you have promised to give Lind his answer to-night. Well?"

Brand was playing idly with a pocket-pencil. After a minute or two he said—

"I promised Natalie to consider this thing without any reference to her whatever—that I would decide just as if there was no possibility of her becoming my wife. I promised that; but it is hard to do, Evelyn. I have tried to imagine my never having seen her; and that I had been led into this affair solely through you. Then I do think that if you had come to me and said that my giving up every penny I possess would forward a good work—would do indirect benefit to a large number of people—and so forth—I do think I could have said, 'All right, Evelyn; take it.' I never cared much for money; I fancy I could get on pretty well on a sovereign a week. I say that if you had come to me with this request——"

"Precisely," Lord Evelyn said, quickly. "You would have said yes, if I had come to you. But because it is Lind, whom you distrust, you fall away from the height of self-sacrifice; and regard the proposal from the point of view of the Waldegrave Club. Mind you, I am not counselling you one way or the other. I am only pointing

out to you that it is your dislike of Lind that prevents your doing what you otherwise would have done."

"Very well," said the other, boldly. "Have I not reason to distrust him? How can I explain his conduct, and his implied threats, except on the supposition that he has been merely playing with me, as far as his daughter is concerned; and that, as soon as I had handed over this property, I should find it out? Oh, it is a very pretty scheme altogether. This heap of English money transferred to the treasury; Lind at length achieving his ambition of being put on the Council; Natalie carried off to Italy; and myself granted the honour of stepping into Lind's shoes in Lisle Street. On the other hand: 'Refuse, and we pack you off to America.' Now, you know, Evelyn, one does not like to be threatened into anything."

"Then you have decided to say no?"

He did not answer for a second or two; when he did, his manner was quite changed.

"I rather think I know what both you and Natalie would have me do; although you won't say so explicitly. And if you and she had come

to me with this proposal, do you think there would have been any difficulty? I should have been satisfied if she had put her hand in mine, and said, 'Thank you.' Then I should have reminded her that she was sacrificing something too."

He relapsed into silence again; Lord Evelyn was vaguely conscious that the minutes were passing by; and that his friend seemed as far off as ever from any decision.

"You remember the old-fashioned rose-garden, Evelyn?"

"At the Beeches? Yes."

"Don't you think Natalie would like the view from that side of the house? And if she chose that side, I was thinking of having a conservatory built all the length of the rooms, with steps opening out into the rose-garden. She could go out there for a stroll of a morning."

So these had been his dreams?

"If I go to America," he said presently, "I should expect you to look after the old place a little bit. You might take your sisters there occasionally, and turn them loose; it wants a woman's hand here and there. Mrs. Alleyne

would put you up all right; and of course I should send Waters down; and give up those rooms in Buckingham Street."

"But I cannot imagine your going to America, somehow," Lord Evelyn said. "Surely there is plenty for you to do here."

"I will say this of Lind, that he is not an idle talker. What he says he means. Besides, Molyneux can take up my work in the north; he is the very man."

Again silence. It was now half-past seven.

"I wish, though, it had been something more exciting," Brand said. "I should not have minded having a turn at the Syrian business; I am not much afraid of risking my neck. There is not much danger in Philadelphia."

"But look here, Brand," said Lord Evelyn, regarding him attentively. "You are speaking with great equanimity about your going to America; possibly you might like the change well enough. But do I understand you that you are prepared to go alone?"

Brand looked up; he understood what was meant.

"If I am ordered: yes."

He held out his right hand; on the third finger there was a massive gold ring—a plain hoop, without any motto or design whatever.

"There," said he, "is the first ring I ever wore. It was given to me this afternoon; to remind me of a promise. And that promise is to me more binding than a hundred oaths."

He rose, with a sigh.

"Ah, well, Evelyn, whatever happens we will not complain. There have been compensations."

"But you have not told me what answer you mean to give to Lind."

"Suppose I wait until I see him before deciding?

"Then you will say no. You have allowed your distrust of him to become a sort of mania; and the moment you see him the mere sight of him will drive you into antagonism."

"I tell you what I wish I could do, Evelyn," said the other, laughing. "I wish I could turn over everything I have got to you; and escape scot-free to America and start my own life free and unencumbered."

"And alone?"

His face grew grave again.

"There is nothing possible else?" said he.

It was nearly eight o'clock when he left. As he walked along Piccadilly a clear and golden twilight was shining over the trees in the Green Park. All around him was the roar of the London streets; but it was not that that he heard. Was it not rather the sound of a soft, low voice, and the silvery notes of the zither? His memory acted as a sea-shell; and brought him an echo from other days and other climes.

Behold the beautiful night—the wind sleeps drowsily—the silent shores slumber in the dark:

Sul placido elemento
Vien meco a navigar!

The soft wind moves—as it stirs among the leaves—it moves and dies—among the murmur of the water:

Lascia l'amico tetto,
Vien meco a navigar!

Now on the spacious mantle—of the already darkening heavens—See, O the shining wonder—how the white stars tremble:

Sul l'onde addormentate
Vien meco a navigar!

This was the voice that he heard amid the roar of the London streets. Would he hear it far away on the wide Atlantic, with the shores of England hidden behind the mists of rain?

To-night was to decide what the future of his life was to be.

If Natalie had appeared at this moment and said to him, "Dearest, let it be as my father wishes;" or if Lord Evelyn had frankly declared to him that it was his duty to surrender his possessions to this Society to which he had devoted his life, there would have been not a moment's hesitation. But now he was going to see a man whom he suspected, and was inclined to hate; and his nature began to harden. It would be a question between one man of the world and another. Sentiment would be put aside. He would no longer be played with. A man should be master of his own affairs.

This was what he said to himself. But he had quite forgotten his determination to consider this matter as if no Natalie existed; and his resolve to exclude sentiment altogether did not interfere with the fact that always, if unconsciously, there remained in his mind a certain picture he had been dreaming a good deal about of late. It was a picture of an old-fashioned rose-garden, in the light of an English summer morning; with a young wife walking there,

herself taller and fairer than any flower. Would she sing in her gladness—the songs of other lands—to charm the sweet English air? There was that one about *O dolce Napoli!—o suol beato!*——

When he got to Lisle Street every one had arrived, except Molyneux himself. Mr. Lind was gravely polite to him. Of course no mention could then be made about private affairs; the talk going on was all about the East and how certain populations were faring.

Presently the pink-faced farmer-agitator was ushered in, looking a little bit alarmed. But this frightened look speedily disappeared, and gave place to one of mild astonishment, as he appeared to recognize the faces of one or two of those in the room. The business of the evening, so far as the brief formalities were concerned, was speedily got over; and five of the members of the small assembly immediately left.

"Now, Mr. Molyneux," said Ferdinand Lind, pleasantly, "Mr. Brand and I have some small private matters to talk over: will you excuse us if we leave you for a few minutes? Here are some articles of our association which you

may look over in the mean time. May I trouble you to follow me, Mr. Brand?"

Brand followed him into an inner and smaller room; and sat down.

"You said you would have your mind made up to-day with regard to the proposal I put before you," Mr. Lind observed, with a matter-of-fact air, as he drew in his chair to the small table.

Brand simply nodded, and said 'Yes.' He was measuring his man. He thought his manner was a good deal too suave.

"But allow me to say, my dear Mr. Brand, that as far as I am concerned, there is no hurry. Have you given yourself time? It is a matter of moment; one should consider."

"I have considered."

His tone was firm. One would have thought he had never had any hesitation at all. But his decision had not been definitely arrived at until, some quarter of an hour before, he had met Ferdinand Lind face to face.

"I may say at once that I prefer to remain in my present grade."

He was watching Lind as he spoke. There was a slight, scarcely perceptible movement of

the eyebrows; that was all. The quiet courtesy of his manner remained undisturbed.

"That is your decision, then," he said, just as if some trifling matter had been arranged.

"Perhaps I need not bother you with my reasons," Brand continued, speaking slowly and with precision, "but there are several."

"I have no doubt you have given the subject serious consideration," said Mr. Lind, without expressing any further interest or curiosity.

Now this was not at all what George Brand wanted. He wanted to have his suspicions allayed or confirmed. He wanted to let this man know how he read the situation.

"One reason I may as well name to you, Mr. Lind," said he—being forced to speak more plainly. "If I were to marry, I should like to give my wife a proper home. I should not like her to marry a pauper—one dependent on the complaisance of other people. And really it has seemed to me strange that you, with your daughter's future, your daughter's interests to think of, should have made this proposal——"

Lind interrupted him with a slight deprecatory motion of the hand.

"Pardon me," said he. "Let us confine ourselves to business, if you please."

"I presume it is a man's business to provide for the future of his wife," said Brand, somewhat hotly; his pride beginning to kick against this patronizing graciousness of manner.

"I must beg of you, my dear sir," said Mr. Lind, with the same calm courtesy, "to keep private interests and projects entirely outside of this matter, which relates to the Society alone, and your duty, and the wishes of those with whom you are associated. You have decided?—very well. I am sorry; but you are within your right."

"How can you talk like that?" said Brand, bluntly. "Sorry? that your daughter is not to marry a beggar?"

"I must decline to have Natalie introduced into this subject in any way whatever," said Mr. Lind.

"Let us drop the subject, then," said Brand, in a friendly way, for he was determined to have some further enlightenment. "Now, about Natalie. May I ask you plainly if you have any objection to a marriage between her and myself?"

The answer was prompt and emphatic.

"I have every objection. I have said before that it would be inexpedient in many ways. It is not to be thought of."

Brand was not surprised by this refusal; he had expected it; he had put the question as a matter of form.

"Now one other question, Mr. Lind, and I shall be satisfied," said he, watching the face of the man opposite him with a keen scrutiny. "Was it ever your intention, at any time, to give your consent to our marriage, in any circumstances whatever?"

Ferdinand Lind was an admirable actor.

"Is it worth while discussing imaginary things—possibilities only?" he said, carelessly.

"Because, you see," continued Brand, who was not to be driven from his point, "any plain and ordinary person, looking from the outside at the whole affair, might imagine that you had been merely temporizing with me, neither giving nor refusing your consent, until I had handed over this money; and that, as you had never intended to let your daughter marry, that was the reason why you did not care

whether I retained a penny of my own property or not."

Lind did not flinch for an instant; nor was there the slightest trace of surprise, or annoyance, or resentment in his look. He rose, and pushed back his chair.

"Suppose we let outsiders think what they please, Mr. Brand," said he, with absolute composure. "We have more serious matters to attend to."

Brand rose also. He guessed what was coming; and he had nerved himself to face it. The whole course of this man's action was now as clear to him as noonday.

"I have been considering further the suggestion I mentioned to you the other day, that you should go over to some of the big American cities," said Mr. Lind, almost with an indifferent air, as he turned over some papers. "We are strong there; you will find plenty of friends; but what is wanted is cohesion, arrangement, co-operation. Now you say yourself this Mr. Molyneux would be an admirable successor to you in the north?"

"None better," said Brand. This sentence

of banishment had been foreseen; he knew how to encounter it when it came.

"I think, on the whole, it would be advisable then. When could you go?"

"I could start to-night," he said. But then despite himself, a blush of embarrassment mounted to his forehead, and he added, quickly, "No. Not to-night. The day after to-morrow."

"There is no need for any such great hurry,' said Mr. Lind, with his complaisant smile. "You will want much direction, many letters. Come, shall we join your friend in the other room?"

The two men, apparently on the best of terms, went back to Molyneux; and the talk became general. George Brand, as he sat there, kept his right hand shut tight; that so he could press the ring that Natalie had given him; and when he thought of America, it was almost with a sense of relief. She would approve; he would not betray his promise to her. But if only that one moment were over, in which he should have to bid her farewell!

CHAPTER IX.

A GOOD-NIGHT MESSAGE.

BRAND had nerved himself for that interview; he had determined to betray neither surprise nor concern; he was prepared for the worst. When it was intimated to him that henceforth his life was to be lived out beyond the seas, he had appeared to take it as a matter of course. Face to face with his enemy, he would utter no protest. Then, had he not solemnly promised to Natalie that nothing in the world should tempt him from his allegiance? Why should he shrink from going to America, or prefer London to Philadelphia? He had entered into a service that took no heed of such things.

But when he had parted from Lind and Molyneux, and got out into the sombre glare of the night-world of London; and when there was no further need for that forced composure, he

began more clearly to recognize his position; and his heart grew heavy. This, then, was the end of those visions of loving companionship and constant and sustaining sympathy with which he had dared to fill the future? He had thought little of anything that might be demanded from him so long as he could anticipate Natalie's approval, and be rewarded with a single glance of gratitude from the proud, dark, beautiful eyes. What mattered it to him what became of himself, what circumstances surrounded them, so long as he and she were together? But now a more terrible sacrifice than any he had dreamed of had to be made. The lady of love whom the Pilgrims had sworn to serve was proving herself inexorable indeed:

—Is she a queen, having great gifts to give?
—Yea, these; that whoso hath seen her shall not live
Except to serve her sorrowing, with strange pain,
Travail and bloodshedding and bitterer tears;
And when she bids die he shall surely die.
And he shall leave all things under the sky,
And go forth naked under sun and rain
And work and wait and watch out all his years.

When Lord Evelyn had asked him whether he was prepared to go to America, *alone*, he had clasped the ring that Natalie had given him, and

answered "Yes." But that was as a matter of theory. It was what he might do, in certain possible circumstances. Now that he had to face the reality, and bethink him of the necessity of taking Natalie's hand for the last time, his heart sank within him.

He walked on blindly through the busy streets, seeing nothing around him. His memory was going over the most trivial incidents connected with Natalie, as if every look of hers, every word she had uttered, was now become something inexpressibly precious. Were there not many things he could carry away with him to the land beyond the seas? No distance or time could rob him of the remembrance of that night at the opera—the scent of white rose—her look as she gave him the forget-me-nots. Then the beautiful shining day as they drew near to Dover; and her pride about England; and the loosened curls of hair that blew about her neck. Or the very first evening on which he had seen her—she sitting at the table and bending over the zither—her profile touched by the rose-tinted light from the shade of the candle—the low, rich voice, only half heard, singing the old, familiar, tender *Lorelei*. He felt

the very touch of her fingers on his arm when she turned to him with reproving eyes: "*Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?*" That poor devil of a Kirski: what had become of him? He would find out from Reitzei; and, before leaving England, would take care that something should be done for the luckless outcast. He should have cause to remember all his life long that Natalie Lind had interfered in his behalf.

Without knowing well how he got there, Brand found himself in Curzon Street. He walked on, perhaps with some vague notion that he might meet Natalie herself, until he arrived at the house. It was quite dark; there was no light in any of the windows; Anneli had not even lit the gas-jet in the narrow hall. He turned away from the door that he felt was now barred against him for ever; and walked back to Clarges Street.

Lord Evelyn was out; the man did not know when he would be home again. So Brand turned away from that door also; and resumed his aimless wanderings, busy with those pictures of the past. At length he got down to Buckingham Street; and almost mechanically made his way towards his own rooms.

He had not reached his door, however, when he heard some one speaking within.

"I might have known," he said to himself. "That is so like Evelyn."

It was indeed Lord Evelyn, who was chatting familiarly with old Waters. But the moment Brand entered, he ceased; and a look of anxiety, and even alarm, appeared instantly on the fine, sensitive, expressive face.

"What is the matter, Brand? Are you ill?"

"No," said the other, dropping into a chair; "only tired—and worried, perhaps. Waters, get me a biscuit and a glass of sherry. Now, when I think of it, I ought to feel tired—I have eaten nothing since eight o'clock this morning."

Lord Evelyn jumped to his feet.

"Come off at once, Brand. We will go up to the Strand, and get you something to eat. Gracious goodness, it is nearly ten o'clock!"

"No, no, never mind. I have something to talk to you about, Evelyn."

"But why on earth had Waters no dinner waiting for you?"

"I did not tell him. I forgot. Never mind; I will have some supper by-and-by. I called on

you, Evelyn, about half an hour ago; I might have known you would be here."

Lord Evelyn paused for a second or two, while Waters came in and went out again. Then he said—

"I can tell by your face, Brand, that something has happened."

"Nothing that I had not foreseen."

"Did you consent or refuse?"

"I refused."

"Well?"

"Then, as I knew he would, he suggested that I might as well get ready to start for America as soon as possible."

Brand was speaking in a light and scornful way; but his face was careworn; and his eyes kept turning to the windows and the dark night outside, as if they were looking at something far away.

"About Natalie?" Lord Evelyn asked.

"Oh, he was frank enough. He dropped all those roundabout phrases about the great honour and so forth. He was quite plain. 'Not to be thought of.'"

Lord Evelyn remained silent for some time.

"I am very sorry, Brand," he said, at length;

and then he continued with some hesitation—"Do you know—I have been thinking—that—that though it is a very extreme thing for a man to give up his fortune—a very extreme thing—I can quite understand how the proposal looked to you very monstrous at first—still, if you put that in the balance as against a man's giving up his native country and the woman whom he is in love with—don't you see—the happiness of two people is of so much more importance than a sum of money, however large——"

"My dear fellow," said Brand, interrupting him, "there is no such alternative—there never was any such alternative. Do you not think I would rather give up twenty fortunes than have to go and bid good-bye to Natalie? It is not a question of money. I suspected before—I know now—that Lind never meant to let his daughter marry. He would not definitely say no to me, while he thought I could be persuaded about this money business; as soon as I refused that, he was frank and explicit enough. I see the whole thing clearly enough now. Well, he has not altogether succeeded."

His eye happened to light on the ring on his

finger; and the frown on his face lifted somewhat.

"If I could only forget Lind; if I could forget why it was that I had to go to America, I should think far less of the pain of separation. If I could go to Natalie, and say, 'Look at what we must do, for the sake of something greater than our own wishes and dreams,' then I think I could bid her good-bye without much faltering; but when you know that it is unnecessary—that you are being made the victim of a piece of personal revenge—how can you look forward with any great enthusiasm to the new life that lies before you? That is what troubles me, Evelyn."

"I cannot argue the matter with you," his friend said, looking down, and evidently much troubled himself. "I cannot help remembering that it was I let you in for all this——"

"Don't say that, Evelyn," Brand broke in, quickly. "Do you think I would have it otherwise? Once in America, I shall no doubt forget how I came to go there. I shall have something to do."

"I—I was going to say that—that perhaps you are not quite fair to Lind. You impute motives that may not exist."

Lord Evelyn flushed a little; it was almost as if he were excusing or defending one he had no particular wish to defend; but all the same, with some hesitation, he continued—

"Consider Lind's position. Mind, your reading of his conduct is only pure assumption. It is quite possible that he would be really and extremely surprised if he knew that you fancied he had been allowing personal feelings to sway his decision. But suppose this—suppose he is honestly convinced that you would be of great service in America. He has seen what you can do in the way of patient persuading of people. I know he has plenty around him who can do the risky business—men who have been adventurous all their lives — who would like nothing better than to be commissioned to set up a secret printing-press next door to the Commissary of Police in St. Petersburg. I say he has plenty of people like that; but very few who have persistence and patience enough to do what you have been doing in the north of England. He told me so himself. Very well. Suppose he thinks that what you have been doing this man Molyneux can carry on? Suppose, in

short, that if he had no daughter at all, he would be anxious to send you to the States?"

Brand nodded. There was no harm in letting his friend have his theory.

"Very well. Now suppose that, having this daughter, he would rather not have her marry. He says she is of great service to him; and his wish to have her with him always would probably exaggerate that service, unconsciously to himself, if it were proposed to take her away. That is only natural?"

Brand again assented.

"Very well. He discovers that you and she are attached to each other. Probably he does not consider it a very serious affair, so far; but he knows that, if you remain in London, it would probably become so. Now, Natalie is a girl of firm character; she is very gentle, but she is not a fool. If you remained in London, she would probably marry you, whether her father liked it or not, if she thought it was right. He knows that; he knows that the girl is capable of acting on her own judgment. Now, put the two things together. Here is this opportune service on which you can be sent. That, according to his view,

will be a good thing in itself; it will also effectually prevent a marriage which he thinks would be inexpedient. Don't you see that there may be no personal revenge or malice in the whole affair? He may consider he is acting quite rightly, with regard to the best interests of everybody concerned."

"I am sick of him, Evelyn—of hearing of him—of thinking of him," Brand said, impatiently. "Come, let us talk of something else. I wish the whole business of starting for America were over; and I had only the future to think about."

"That is not likely," said Lord Evelyn, gently. "You cannot cut yourself away from everything like that. There will be *some* memories."

Waters here appeared with a tray; and speedily placed on the table a lobster, some oysters, and a bottle of Chablis.

"There you are, Evelyn; have some supper."

"Not unless you have some."

"By-and-by——"

"No, now."

So the two friends drew in their chairs.

"I have been thinking," said Lord Evelyn—with a slight flush, for he was telling a lie—"I

have been thinking for some time back I should like to go to America for a year or two. There are some political phases I should like to study."

Brand looked at him.

"You never thought of it before to-night. But it is like you to think of it now."

"Oh, I assure you," said the other, hastily, "there are points of great interest in the political life of America that one could only properly study on the spot—hearing the various opinions, don't you know—and seeing how the things practically work. I should have gone long before now, but that I dreaded the passage across. When do you go?"

"It is not settled yet."

"What line shall you go by?"

"I don't know."

Lord Evelyn paused for a moment; then he said—

"I'll go with you, Brand."

Well, he had not the heart even to protest; for he thoroughly understood the generous friendship that had prompted such an offer. He might remonstrate afterwards; now he would not. On the contrary, he began to speak of his experience

of the various lines; of the delight of the voyage to any one not abnormally sensitive to sea-sickness; of the humours of the bagmen; of the occupations and amusements on board; of dolphins, fog-horns, icebergs, rope-quoits, grass-widows, and the chances of poker. It was all a holiday excursion, then? The two friends lit their cigars, and went back to their armchairs. The tired and haggard look on George Brand's face had for the moment been banished.

But by-and-by he said, rather absently—

"I suppose, hereafter, Natalie and you will have many a talk over what has happened. And you will go there just as usual, and spend the evening, and hear her read, or listen to her singing with the zither. It seems strange. Perhaps she will be able to forget altogether; to cut this unhappy episode out of her life, as it were." Then he added, as if speaking to himself: "No, she is not likely to forget."

Lord Evelyn looked up.

"In the mean time, does she know about your going?"

"I presume not—not yet. But I must see her, and tell her. Unless, indeed, Lind should

try to prevent that too. He might lay injunctions on her that she was not to see me again."

"That is true," his friend said. "He might command. But the question is whether she would obey. I have known Natalie Lind longer than you have. She is capable of thinking and acting for herself."

Nothing further was said on this point; they proceeded to talk of other matters. It was perhaps a quarter of an hour afterwards—close on eleven o'clock—that Waters knocked at the door and then came into the room.

"A letter for you, sir."

A quick glance at the envelope startled him.

"How did you get it?" he said, instantly.

"A girl brought it, sir, in a cab. She is gone again. There was no answer, she said."

Waters withdrew. Brand hastily opened the letter, and read the following lines, written in pencil, apparently with a trembling hand: —

"*Dearest,*

"*I spent this evening with Madame Potecki. My father came for me; and on the way home has told me something of what has occurred. It was*

for the purpose of telling me that you and I must not meet again—never, never. My own, I cannot allow you to pass a single night, or a single hour, thinking such a thing possible. Have I not promised to you? When it is your wish to see me, come to me: I am yours. Good night; and Heaven guard you!

"NATALIE."

George Brand turned to his friend.

"This," said he—but his lip trembled, and he stopped for a second. Then he continued: "This is a message from her, Evelyn. And I know what poor old Calabressa would say of it, if he were here. He would say: 'That is what might have been expected from the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi!'"

"She knows, then?"

"Yes," said he, still looking at the hastily written lines in pencil. "And it is as you imagined. Her father has told her we must not see each other again; and she has refused to be bound by any such injunction. I rather fancy she thinks he must have conveyed the same intimation to me; at all events she has written at once to assure me that she will not break her

promise to me. It was kindly meant: was it not? I wish Anneli had waited for a second."

He folded up the letter, and put it in his pocket-book; it was one more treasure he should carry with him to America. But when, later on, Evelyn had left, he took it out again, and re-read again and again the irregular, hurried, pencilled lines; and thought of the proud, quick, generous spirit that had prompted them. And was she still awake, and thinking? And could her heart hear, through the silence of the night, the message of love and gratitude that he sent her? "*Good night; and Heaven guard you!*" It had been a troubled and harassing day for him; but this tender good-night message came in at the close of it, like a strain of sweet music, that he would carry with him into the land of dreams.

CHAPTER X.

SOME TREASURES.

THE next morning Natalie was sitting alone in the little dining-room, dressed ready to go out. Perhaps she had been crying a little by herself; but at all events, when she heard the sound of some one being admitted at the front door, and coming into the passage, she rose with a flush of pleasure and relief appearing on her pale and saddened face. It was Madame Potecki.

"Ah, it is so good of you to come early," said Natalie to her friend, with a kind of forced cheerfulness. "Shall we start at once? I have been thinking and thinking myself into a state of misery; and what is the use of that?"

"Let me look at you," said the prompt little music-mistress, taking both her hands, and regarding her with her clear, shrewd blue eyes.

"No; you are not looking well. The walk will do you good, my dear. Come away, then."

But Natalie paused in the passage, with some appearance of embarrassment. Anneli was standing by the door.

"Remember this, Anneli: if any one calls and wishes to see me—and particularly wishes to see me—you will not say, 'My mistress is gone out.' You will say, 'My mistress is gone to the South Kensington Museum, with Madame Potecki.' Do you understand that, Anneli?"

"Yes, Fräulein; certainly."

Then they left, going by way of the Park. And the morning was fresh and bright; the energetic little Polish lady was more talkative and cheerful than ever; the girl with her had only to listen, with as much appearance of interest as was possible, considering that her thoughts were so apt to wander away elsewhither.

"My dear, what a lovely morning for us to go and look at my treasures! The other day I was saying to myself, 'There is my adopted daughter Natalie; and I have not a farthing to leave her. What is the use of adopting a child if you have nothing to leave her?' Then I said to myself,

'Never mind: I will teach her my theory of living; that will make her richer than a hundred legacies will do.' Dear, dear, that was all the legacy my poor husband left to me."

She passed her hand over her eyes.

"Don't you ever marry a man who has anything to do with politics, my child. Many a time my poor Potecki used to say to me, 'My angel, cultivate contentment; you may have to live on it some day.'"

"And you have taken his advice, madame; you are very content."

"Why? Because I have my theory. They think that I am poor. It is poor Madame Potecki, who earns her solitary supper by 'One, two, three, four; One, two, three, four;' who has not a treasure in the world—except a young Hungarian lady, who is almost a daughter to her. Well, well; but you know my way of thinking, my dear: you laugh at it; I know you do. You say, 'That mad little Madame Potecki.' But some day I will convince you."

"I am willing to be taught now, madame—seriously. Is it not wise to be content?"

"I am more than content, my dear; I am

proud; I am vain. When I think of all the treasures that belong to the public, and to me as one of the public—the Turner landscapes in the National Gallery; the books and statues in the British Museum; the bronzes and china and jewellery at South Kensington—do you not think, my dear, that I am thankful I have no paltry little collection in my own house, that I should be ashamed of? Then look at the care that is taken of them. I have no risk. I am not disheartened for a day because a servant has broken my best piece of Nankin blue. I have no trouble and no thought; it is only when I have a little holiday that I say to myself, 'Well, shall I go and see my Rembrandts? Or shall I look over my cases of Etruscan rings? Or shall I go and feast my eyes on the *bleu de roi* of a piece of jewelled Sèvres?' Oh, my love!"

She clasped her hands in ecstacy. Her volubility had outrun itself, and got choked.

"I will show you three vases," said she, presently, in almost a solemn way; "I will show you three vases, in white and brown crackle, that put all the colour in the whole of my collection to shame. My dear, I have never seen in the world

anything so lovely—the soft cream-white ground, the rich brown decoration—the beautiful, bold, graceful shape; and they only cost £60!—£60 for the three; and they worth a kingdom! Why—— But really, my dear Natalie, you walk too fast. I feel as if I were being marched off to prison!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" said the girl, laughing. "I am always forgetting; and papa scolds me often enough for it."

"Have you heard what I told you about those priceless vases in the South Kensington?"

"I am most anxious to see them, I assure you."

"My blue and white," Madame Potecki continued, seriously, "I am afraid is not always of the best. There are plenty of good pieces, it is true; but they are not the finest feature of the collection. Oh! the Benares brocades—I had forgotten them. Ah, my dear, these will make you open your eyes!"

"But don't you get bewildered, madame, with having to think of so many possessions?" said Natalie, respectfully.

"No," said the other, in a matter-of-fact way.

"I take them one by one. I pay a morning call here, a morning call there, when I have no appointments, just to see that everything is going on well."

Presently she said—

"Ah, well, my dear, we are poor, weak creatures. Here and there in my wanderings I have met things that I almost coveted; but see, what an impossible, monstrous collection they would make! Let me think, now. The Raphael at Dresden; two Titian portraits in the Louvre the Venus of Milo—not the Medici one at all; I would not take it; I swear I would not accep it, that trivial little creature with the yellow skin!"

"My dear friend, the heavens will fall on you!" her companion exclaimed.

"Wait a moment," said the little music-mistress, reflectively. "I have not completed my collection. There is a Holy Family of Botticelli's —I forget where I saw it. And the bust of the Empress Messalina in the Uffizi: did you ever notice it, Natalie?"

"No."

"Do not forget it when you are in Florence

again. You won't believe any of the stories about her when you see the beautiful refined face: only don't forget to remark how flat the top of her head is. Well, where are we, my dear? The bronze head of the goddess in the Castellani collection: I would have that; and the fighting Temeraire. Will these do? But then, my dear, even if one had all these things, see what a monstrous collection they would make. What should I do with them in my lodgings, even if I had room? No; I must be content with what I have."

By this time they had got down into South Kensington, and were drawing near one of Madame Potecki's great treasure-houses.

"Then, you see, my dear Natalie," she continued, "my ownership of these beautiful things we are going to see is not selfish. It can be multiplied indefinitely. You may have it too; any one may have it, and all without the least anxiety!"

"That is very pleasant also," said the girl, who was paying less heed now. The forced cheerfulness that had marked her manner at starting had in great measure left her. Her look

was absent; she blindly followed her guide through the little wicket, and into the hushed large hall.

The silence was grateful to her; there was scarcely any one in the place. While Madame Potecki busied herself with some catalogue or other, the girl turned aside into a recess, to look at a cast of the effigy on the tomb of Queen Eleanor of Castile. A tombstone stills the air around it. Even this gilt plaster figure was impressive; it had the repose of the dead.

But she had not been standing there for a couple of seconds when she heard a well-known voice behind her.

"Natalie!"

She knew. There was neither surprise nor shamefacedness in her look when she turned and saw George Brand before her. Her eyes were as fearless as ever when they met his; and they were glad, too, with a sudden joy; and she said quickly—

"Ah, I thought you would come. I told Anneli."

"It was kind of you—and brave—to let me come to see you."

"Kind?" she said. "How could I do otherwise?"

"But you are looking tired, Natalie."

"I did not sleep much last night. I was thinking."

The tears started to her eyes; she impatiently brushed them aside.

"I know what you were thinking. That is why I came so early to see you. You were blaming yourself for what has happened. That is not right. You are not to blame at all. Do you think I gave you that promise for nothing?"

"You were always like that," she said, in a low voice. "Very generous, and unselfish. Yes, I—I—was miserable—I thought if you had never known me——"

"If I had never known you! You think that would be a desirable thing for me!——"

But at this moment the hurried, anxious, half-whispered conversation had to cease; for Madame Potecki came up. Nor was she surprised to find Mr. Brand there. On the contrary, she said that her time was limited; and that she could not expect other people to care for old porcelain as much as she did; and if Mr. Brand would take

her dear daughter Natalie to see some pictures in the rooms upstairs, she would come and find her out by-and-by.

"Not at all, dear madame," said Natalie, with some slight flush. "No. We will go with you to see the three wonderful vases."

So they went, and saw the three crackle vases, and many another piece of porcelain and enamel and bronze; but always the clever little Polish woman took care that she should be at some other case, so that she could not overhear what these two had to say to each other. And they had plenty to say.

"Why, Natalie, where is your courage? What is the going to America? It cannot be for ever and ever."

"But even then?" she said, in a low, hesitating voice. "If you were never to see me again, you would blame me for it all. You would regret."

"How can I regret that my life was made beautiful to me, if only for a time? It was worth nothing to me before. And you are forgetting all about the ring, and my promise to you."

This light way of talking did not at all deceive

her. What had been torturing her all the night long was the fancy, the suspicion, that her father was sending her lover to America, not solely with a view to the work he should have to undertake there, but to ensure a permanent separation between herself and him. That was the cruel bit of it. And she more than ever admired the manliness of this man, because he would make no complaint to her. He had uttered no word of protest, for fear of wounding her. He did not mention her father to her at all; but merely treated this project of going to America as if it were a part of his duty, that had to be cheerfully accepted.

"After I have once said good-bye to you, Natalie," said he, "it will not be so bad for me. I shall have my work."

"When do you go?" she asked, with rather a white face.

"I don't know yet. It may be a matter of days. You will let me see you again, my darling —soon?"

"I shall be here every morning, if you wish it," she answered.

"To-morrow, then?"

"To-morrow, at eleven. Anneli will come with me. I should have waited in on the hope of seeing you this morning; but it was an old engagement with Madame Potecki. Ah, how good she is! Do you see how she pretends to be interested in those things?"

"I will send her a present of some old china before I leave England," said Brand.

"No, no," said Natalie, with a faint smile appearing on the sad face. "It would destroy her theory. She does not care for anything at home, so long as she possesses these public treasures. She is very content. Indeed, she earns enough to be charitable. She has many poor dependants."

By-and-by Madame Potecki, with great evident reluctance, confessed that she had to return, as one of her pupils would be at her house by half-past twelve. But would not Mr. Brand take her dear adopted child to see some of the pictures? It was a pity that she should be dragged away; and so forth.

But Natalie promptly put an end to these suggestions by saying that she would prefer to return with Madame Potecki; and, it being now past

twelve, as soon as they got outside, she engaged a cab. George Brand saw them off; and then returned into the building. He wished to look again at the objects she had looked at; to recollect every word she had uttered; to recall the very tones in which she had spoken. And this place was so hushed and quiet.

Meanwhile, as the occupants of the cab were journeying northward, Natalie took occasion to say to her companion, with something of a heightened colour—

"You must not imagine, dear madame, that I expected to see Mr. Brand at the Museum when I promised to go with you."

"But what if you had expected, my child?" said the good-natured music-mistress. "What harm is there?"

"But this morning I did expect him to come; and that is why I left the message with Anneli," continued the girl. "Because, do you know, madame, he is going to America; and when he goes, I may not see him again for many years."

"My child!" the demonstrative little woman exclaimed, catching hold of the girl's hand.

But Natalie was not inclined to be sympathetic at this moment.

"Now I wish you, dear Madame Potecki," she continued, in a firm voice, "to do me a favour. I would rather not speak to my father about Mr. Brand. I wish you to tell him for me that, so long as Mr. Brand remains in England, I shall continue to see him; and that, as I do not choose he should come to my father's house, I shall see him as I saw him this morning."

"My love, my love, what a frightful duty! Is it necessary?"

"It is necessary that my father should know, certainly."

"But what a responsibility!"

"You have no responsibility whatever. Anneli will go with me. All that I ask of you, dear Madame Potecki, is to take the message to my father. You will; will you not?"

"More than that I will do for you," said the little woman, boldly. "I see there is unhappiness; you are suffering, my child. Well, I will plunge into it; I will see your father; this cannot be allowed. It is a dangerous thing to interfere —who knows better than I? But to sit near you

is to be inspired; to touch your hand is to gain the courage of a giant. Yes, I will speak to your father; all shall be put right."

The girl scarcely heard her.

"There is another thing I would ask of you," she said, slowly and wistfully, "but not here. May I come to you when the lesson is over?"

"At two: yes."

So it was that Natalie called on her friend shortly after two o'clock; and was shown into the little parlour. She was rather pale. She sat down at one side of the table.

"I wished to ask your advice, dear Madame Potecki," she said, in a low voice, and with her eyes down. "Now you must suppose a case. You must suppose that—that two people love each other—better—better than anything else in the world; and that they are ready to sacrifice a great deal for each other. Well, the man is ordered away; it is a banishment from his own country, perhaps for ever; and he is very brave about it; and will not complain. Now, you must suppose that the girl is very miserable about his going away; and blames herself; and perhaps—perhaps wishes—to do something to show she

understands his nobleness—his devotion; and she would do anything in the world—anything in the world, Madame Potecki—to prove her love to him——"

"But child, child, why do you tremble so?"

"I wish you to tell me, Madame Potecki—I wish you to tell me—whether—you would consider it unwomanly—unmaidenly—for her to go and say to him, 'You are too brave and unselfish to ask me to go with you. Now I offer myself to you. If you must go, why not I—your wife?'"

Madame Potecki started up in great alarm.

"Natalie, what do you mean?"

"I only—wished to—to ask—what you would think."

She was very pale, and her lips were tremulous; but she did not break down. Madame Potecki was apparently far more agitated than she was.

"My child, my child, I am afraid you are on the brink of some wild thing!"

"Is that that I have repeated to you what a girl ought to do?" Natalie said, almost calmly. "Do you think it is what my mother would have done, Madame Potecki? They have told me she was a brave woman."

CHAPTER XI.

IN A GARDEN AT POSILIPO.

—Prends mon cœur, me dit-elle,
Oui, mais à la chapelle,
Sois mon petit . . . .
—Plaît-il
Ton petit?
—Sois mon petit mari!

—It was Calabressa who was gaily humming to himself; and it was well that he could amuse himself with his *chansons* and his cigarettes; for his friend Edwards was proving anything but an attentive companion. The tall, near-sighted, blond-faced man from the British Museum was far too much engrossed by the scene around him. They were walking along the quays at Naples; and it so happened that at this moment all the picturesque squalor and lazy life of the place were lit up by the glare reflected from a wild and stormy sunset. The tall, pink-fronted houses; the mules

and oxen with their brazen yokes and tinkling bells; the fruit-sellers, and fish-sellers, and water-carriers, in costumes of many hues; the mendicant friars with their cloak and hood of russet-brown; the priests black and clean-shaven; the groups of women, swarthy of face, with head-dresses of red or yellow, clustered round the stalls; the children, in rags of brown, and scarlet, and olive-green, lying about the pavement as if artists had posed them there;—all these formed a picture which was almost bewildering in its richness of colour; and was no doubt rendered all the more brilliant because of the powerful contrast with the dark and driven sea. For the waters out there were racing in before a stiff breeze, and springing high on the fortresses and rocks; and the clouds overhead were seething and twisting, with many a sudden flash of orange; and then, far away beyond all this colour and motion and change, rose the vast and gloomy bulk of Vesuvius, overshadowed and thunderous, as if the mountain were charged with a coming storm.

Calabressa grew impatient; despite his careless song.

"—Me seras tu fidèle . . .
—Comme une tourterelle.
—Eh bien, ça va . . . .
Ça va!
—Ça me va!
—Comme ça, ça me va!

—*Diable*, Monsieur Edouarts! You are very silent. You do not know where we are going, perhaps?"

Edwards started, as if he were waking from a reverie.

"Oh yes, Signor Calabressa," said he, "I am not likely to forget that. Perhaps I think more seriously about it than you. To you it is nothing. But I cannot forget, you see, that you and I are practically conniving at a murder."

"Hush, hush, my dear friend!" said Calabressa, glancing round. "Be discreet! And what a foolish phrase, too! You? You whose business is merely to translate; to preach; to educate a poor devil of a Russian. What have you to do with it? And to speak of murder! Bah! You do not understand the difference, then, between killing a man as an act of private anger and revenge, and executing a man for crimes against society? My good friend Edouarts, you

have lived all your life among books; but you have not learned any logic—no!"

Edwards was not inclined to go into any abstract argument.

"I will do what I have been appointed to do," he said, curtly. "But that cannot prevent my wishing that it had not to be done at all."

"And who knows?" said Calabressa, lightly. "Perhaps, if you are so fearful about your small share—your very little share—it is no more than that of the garçon who helps one on with his coat—is he accessory, too, if a rogue has to be punished?—is he responsible for the sentence, also, if he brushes the boots of the judge?—or the servant of the court, who sweeps out the room, is he guilty if there is a miscarriage of justice? No, no; my dear friend Edouarts, do not alarm yourself. Then, I was saying, perhaps it may not be necessary, after all. You perceived, my friend, that when the proposal of his Eminence the Cardinal was mentioned, the Secretary Granaglia smiled, and I, thoughtless, laughed. You perceived it, did you not?"

By this time they were in the Chiaja, beyond the Villa Reale; and there were fewer people

about. Calabressa stopped; and confronted his companion. For the purposes of greater emphasis, he rested his right elbow in the palm of his left hand; while his fore-finger was at the point of his nose.

"What?" said he, in this striking attitude, "what if we were both fools—hé? The Secretary Granaglia and myself—what if we were both fools?"

Calabressa abandoned his pose, linked his arm within that of his companion, and walked on with him.

"Come, I will emplant something in your mind. I will throw out a fancy; it may take root and flourish: if not, who is the worse? Now, if the Council were really to entertain that proposal of Zaccatelli?"

He regarded his friend Edouarts.

"You observed, I say, that Granaglia smiled: to him it was ludicrous. I laughed: to me it was farcical—the chatter of a *bavard*. The Pope become the patron of a secret society! The priests become our friends and allies! Very well, my friend; but listen. The little minds see what is absurd; the great minds are serious. Granaglia

is a little devil of courage; but he is narrow; he is practical; he has no imagination. I? What am I?—careless, useless, also a *bavard*, if you will. But it occurred to me, after all, when I began to think—what a great man, a great mind, might say to this proposal. Take a man like Lind: see what he could make of it! 'Do not laugh at it any more, Calabressa,' said I to myself; 'until you hear the opinion of wiser men than yourself.'"

He gripped Edwards's arm tight.

"Listen. To become the allies of the priests, it is not necessary to believe everything the priests say. On the other hand, they need not approve all that we are doing, if only they withdraw their opposition. Do you perceive the possibility now? Do you think of the force of that combination? The multitudes of the Catholics encouraged to join!—the Vatican the friend and ally of the COUNCIL OF THE SEVEN STARS!"

He spoke the last words in a low voice; but he wore a proud look.

"And if this proposal were entertained," said Edwards, meditatively, "of course, they would abandon this other business."

"My good friend," said Calabressa, confidentially. "I know that Lind, who sees things with a large vision, is against it. He consents—as you consent to do your little outside part—against his own opinion. More; if he had been on the Council, the decree would never have been granted, though De Bedros and a dozen of his daughters had demanded it. 'Calabressa,' he said to me, 'it will do great mischief in England, if it is known that we are connected with it.' Well, you see, all this would be avoided if they closed with the Cardinal's offer."

"You are sanguine, Signor Calabressa," said the other.

"Besides, the thirty thousand lire!" said Calabressa, eagerly. "Do you know what that is? Ah, you English have always too much money!"

"No doubt," said Edwards, with a smile. "We are all up to the neck in gold."

"Thirty thousand lire a year, and the favour of the Vatican; what fools Granaglia and I were to laugh! But perhaps we will find that the Council were wiser."

They had now got out to Posilipo; and the stormy sunset had waned, leaving the sky over-

clouded and dusk. Calabressa, having first looked up and down the road, stopped by the side of a high wall, over which projected a number of the broken, grey-green, spiny leaves of the cactus—a hedge at the foot of the terrace above.

"*Peste!*" said he. "How the devil is one to find it out in the dark?"

"Find what out?"

"My good friend," said he, in a whisper, "you are not able by chance to see a bit of thread—a bit of red thread—tied round one of those big leaves?"

Edwards glanced up.

"Not I."

"Ah, well, we must run the risk. Perhaps by accident there may be a meeting."

They walked on for some time, Calabressa becoming more and more watchful. They paused to let a man driving a waggon and a pair of oxen go by; and then Calabressa, enjoining his companion to remain where he was, went on alone.

The changing sky had opened somewhat overhead; and there was a wan twilight shining through the parted clouds. Edwards, looking after Calabressa, could have fancied that the dark

figure had disappeared like a ghost; but the old albino had merely crossed the road, opened the one-half of a huge gate, and entered a garden.

It was precisely like the gardens of the other villas along the highway—cut in terraces along the steep side of the hill, with winding pathways, and marble lions here and there, and little groves of orange and olive and fig trees; while on one side the sheer descent was guarded by an enormous cactus hedge. The ground was very unequal; on one small plateau a fountain was playing—the trickling of the water the only sound audible in the silence.

Calabressa took out his pocket-book, and tore a leaf from it.

"The devil!" he muttered to himself. "How is one to write in the dark?"

But he managed to scrawl the word "Barsanti;" then he wrapped the paper round a small pebble; and approached the fountain. By putting one foot on the edge of the stone basin beneath, he could reach over to the curved top; and there he managed to drop the missive into some aperture concealed under the lip. He stepped back; dried his hand with his handkerchief; and then went

down one of the pathways to a lower level of the garden.

Here he easily found the entrance to an ordinary sort of grotto—a narrow cave winding inwards and ending in a piece of fancy rockwork down which the water was heard to trickle. But he did not go to the end. He stopped about half-way; and listened. There was no sound whatever in the dark, except the plash of the tiny waterfall.

Then there was a heavy grating noise; and in the black wall before him appeared a vertical line of orange light. This sudden gleam was so bewildering to the eyes that Calabressa could not see who it was that came out to him; he only knew that the stranger waited for him to pass on into the outer air.

"It is cooler here. To your business, friend Calabressa."

The moment Calabressa recognized this tall, military-looking man, with the closely cropped bullet-head and long, silver-white moustache, he whipped off his cap, and said, anxiously—

"A thousand pardons, Excellency! a thousand pardons! Do I interrupt? May not I see Fossati?"

"It is unnecessary. There is much business to-night. One must breathe the air sometimes."

Calabressa for once had completely lost his *sang-froid.* He could not speak for stammering.

"I assure you, your Excellency, it is death to me to think that I interrupt you."

"But why did you come, then, my friend? To the point."

"Zaccatelli," the other managed to get out.

"Well?"

"There was a proposal. Some days ago I saw Granaglia."

"Well?"

"Pardon me, Excellency. If I had known, not for worlds would I have called you——"

"Come, come, my Calabressa," said the other, good-naturedly. "No more apologies. What is it you have to say? The proposal made by the Cardinal? Yes; we know about that."

"And it has not been accepted? The decree remains?"

"You waste your breath, my friend. The decree remains, certainly. We are not children; we do not play. What more, my Calabressa?"

But Calabressa had to collect his thoughts. Then he said, slowly—

"It occurred to me, when I was in England—there was a poor devil there who would have thrown away his life in a useless act of revenge—well——"

"Well, you brought him over here," said the other, interrupting him. "Your object? Ah, Lind and you being old comrades; and Lind appearing to you to be in a difficulty? But did Lind approve?"

"Not quite," said Calabressa, still hesitating. "He allowed us to try. He was doubtful himself."

"I should have thought so," said the other, ironically. "No, good Calabressa; we cannot accept the services of a maniac. The night has got dark; I cannot see whether you are surprised. How do we know? The man Kirski has been twice examined—once in Venice, once this morning, when you went down to the *Luisa;* the reports the same. What? To have a maniac blundering about the gates; attracting every one's notice by his gibberish; then he is arrested with a pistol or a knife in his hand; he talks nonsense about some Madonna; he is frightened into a confession; and we become the laughing-stock

of Europe! Impossible—impossible, my Calabressa: where were your wits? No wonder Lind was doubtful—— "

"The man is capable of being taught," said Calabressa, humbly.

"We need not waste more breath, my friend. To-night Lind will be reminded why it was necessary that the execution of this decree was entrusted to the English section: he must not send any Russian madman to compromise us."

"Then I must take him back, your Excellency?"

"No; send him back — with the English scholar. You will remain in Naples, Calabressa. There is something stirring that will interest you."

"I am at your service, Excellency."

"Good night, my friend."

The figure beside him had disappeared almost before he had time to return the salutation; and he was left to find his way down to the gate—taking care not to run unawares on one of the long cactus spines. He discovered Edwards precisely where he had left him.

"Ah, Monsieur Edouarts, now you may clap your hands—now you may shout an English

'Hurrah!' For you at all events there is good news."

"That project has been abandoned, then?" said Edwards, eagerly.

"No, no, no," said Calabressa, loftily; as if he had never entertained such a possibility. "Do you think the Council is to be played with, is to be bribed by so many and so many lire? No, no. Its decree is inviolable."

"Well, then?"

"Well, then; some stupidities of our Russian friend have saved you; they know everything, these wonderful people; they say 'No; we will not trust the affair to a madman.' Do you perceive? What you have to do now is to take Kirski back to England."

"And I am not wanted any longer?" said the other, with the same eagerness.

"I presume not. I am. I remain in Naples. For you, you are free—away to England! I give you my blessing; and to-night—to-night you will give me a bottle of wine."

But presently he added, as they still walked on—

"Friend Edouarts, do you think I should be

humiliated because my little plan has been refused? No. It was born of idleness. My freedom was new to me; over in England I had nothing to do. And when Lind objected, I talked him over. *Peste,* if those fellows of the Society had not got at the Russian, all might have been well."

"You will forgive my pointing out," said Edwards, in quite a facetious way, "that all would not have been so well with me, for one. I am very glad to be able to wash my hands of it. You shall have not only one but two bottles of wine with supper, if you please."

"Well, friend Edouarts, I bring you the good news; but I am not the author of it. No; I must confess. I would rather have had my plan carried out. But what matters? One does one's best from time to time—the hours go by—at the end comes sleep; and no one can torment you more."

They walked on for a time in silence. And now before them lay the wonderful sight of Naples ablaze with a dusky yellow radiance in the dark; and far away beyond the most distant golden points, high up in the black deeps of the

sky, the constant, motionless, crimson glow of Vesuvius told them where the peaks of the mountain, themselves unseen, towered above the sea.

By-and-by they plunged into the great, murmuring city.

"You are going back to England, Monsieur Edouarts. You will take Kirski to Mr. Brand; he will be reinstated in his work; Englishmen do not forget their promises. Then I have another little commission for you."

He went into one of the small jeweller's shops; and, after a great deal of haggling—for his purse was not heavy, and he knew the ways of his countrymen—he bought a necklace of pink coral. It was carefully wrapped in wool and put into a box. Then they went outside again.

"You will give this little present, my good friend Edouarts, you will take it, with my compliments, to my beautiful, noble child Natalie; and you will tell her that it did not cost much, but it is only a message—to show that Calabressa still thinks of her, and loves her, always."

CHAPTER XII.

FRIEND AND SWEETHEART.

MADAME POTECKI was a useful enough adviser in the small and ordinary affairs of everyday life; but face to face with a great emergency she became terrified and helpless.

"My dear, my dear," she kept repeating, in a flurried sort of way, "you must not do anything rash. You must not do anything wild. Oh, my dear, take care: it is so wicked for children to disobey their parents."

"I am no longer a child, Madame Potecki. I am a woman; I know what seems to me just and unjust. And I only wish to do right." She was now quite calm. She had mastered that involuntary tremulousness of the lips. It was the little Polish lady who was agitated.

"My dear Natalie, I will go to your father. I said I would go—even with your message—

though it is a frightful task. But how can I tell him that you have this other project in your mind? Oh, my dear, be cautious; don't do anything you will have to repent of in after years!"

"You need not tell him, dear Madame Potecki if you are alarmed," said the girl. "I will tell him myself, when I have come to a decision. So you cannot say what one ought to do in such circumstances? You cannot tell me what my mother, for example, would have done in such a case?"

"Oh, I can; I can, my dear," said the other, eagerly. "At least I can tell you what is best and safest. Is it not for a girl to go by her father's advice—her father's wishes? Then she is safe. Anything else is wild, dangerous. My dear, you are far too impulsive. You do not think of consequences. It is all the affair of the moment with you; and how you can do some one you love a kindness at the instant. Your heart is warm, and you are quick to act. All the more reason, I say, that you should go by some one else's judgment; and who can guide you better than your own father?"

"I know already what my father wishes," said Natalie.

"Then why not go by that, my dear? Be sure it is the safest. Do you think I would take it on me to say otherwise? Ah, my dear child, romance is very beautiful at your age; but one may sacrifice too much for it."

"It is not a question of romance at all," said Natalie, looking down. "It is a question of what it is right that a girl should do, in faithfulness to one whom she loves. But perhaps it is better not to argue it; for one sees so differently at different ages. And I am very grateful to you, dear Madame Potecki, for agreeing to take that message to my father; but I will tell him myself."

She rose. The little woman came instantly and caught her by both hands.

"Is my child going to quarrel with me, because I am old and unsympathetic?"

"Oh no, do not think that!" said Natalie, quickly.

"What you say is quite true, my dear; different ages see differently; when I was at your age perhaps I was as liable as any one to let my heart get the better of my head. And do I regret it?" The little woman sighed. "Many a time they warned me against marrying one who did

not stand well with the authorities. But I—I had my opinions, too; I was a patriot, like the rest. We were all mad with enthusiasm—ah, the secret meetings in Warsaw!—the pride of them! —we girls would not marry one who was not a patriot. But that is all over now; and here am I an old woman; with nothing left but my old masters, and my china, and my 'One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four.'"

Here a knock outside warned Natalie that she must leave, another pupil no doubt having arrived; and so she bade good-bye to her friend, not much enlightened or comforted by her counsel.

That evening Mr. Lind brought Beratinsky home with him to dinner—an unusual circumstance, for at one time Beratinsky had wished to become a suitor for Natalie's hand, and had had that project very promptly knocked on the head by Lind himself. Thereafter he had come but seldom to the house; and never without a distinct invitation. On this evening the two men talked almost exclusively between themselves; and Natalie was not sorry to be allowed to remain an inattentive listener. She was thinking of other things.

When Beratinsky had gone, Lind turned to his daughter, and said to her pleasantly—

"Well, Natalie, what have you been about to-day?"

"First of all," said she, regarding her father with those fearless eyes of hers, "I went to the South Kensington Museum with Madame Potecki. Mr. Brand was there."

His manner changed instantly.

"By appointment?" he said, sharply.

"No," she answered. "I thought he would call here; and I told Anneli where we had gone."

Lind betrayed no expression of annoyance. He only said coldly—

"Last night I told you it was my wish that he and you should have no further communication with each other."

"Yes; but is it reasonable, is it fair, is it possible, papa?" she said, forgetting for a moment her forced composure. "Do you think I can forget why he is going away?"

"Apparently you do not know why he is going away," her father said. "He is going to America because his duty commands that he should. Because he has work to do there of more importance

than sentimental entanglements in this country. He understands himself the necessity of his going."

The girl's cheeks burned red; and she sat silent. How could she accuse her own father of prevarication? But the crisis was a momentous one.

"You forget, papa," she said, at length, in a low voice, "that when you returned from abroad, and got Mr. Brand's letter, you came to me. You said that if there was any further question of a—a marriage—between Mr. Brand and myself, you would have to send him to America. I was to be the cause of his banishment."

"I spoke hastily—in anger," her father said, with some impatience. "Quite apart from any such question, Mr. Brand knows that it is of great importance some one like himself should go to Philadelphia; and at the moment I don't see any one who could do as well. Have you anything further to say?"

"No, papa—except good night." She kissed him on the forehead; and went away to her own room.

That was a night of wild unrest for Natalie

Lind. It was her father himself who had represented to her all that banishment from his native country meant to an Englishman; and in her heart of hearts she believed that it was through her this doom had befallen George Brand. She knew he would not complain. He professed to her that it was only in the discharge of an ordinary duty he was leaving England; others had suffered more for less reason; it was nothing; why should she blame herself? But all the same —through this long, restless, agonizing night— she accused herself of having driven him from his country and his friends, of having made an exile of him. And again and again she put before herself the case she had submitted to Madame Potecki; and again and again she asked herself what her own mother would have done, with her lover going away to a strange land.

In the morning, long before it was light, and while as yet she had not slept for a second, she rose, threw a dressing-gown round her, lit the gas, and went to the little escritoire that stood by the window. Her hand was trembling when she sat down to write; but it was not with the cold. There was a proud look on her face.

This was what she wrote: "*My lover and husband,—You are going away from your own country, perhaps for ever; and I think it is partly through me that all this has happened. What can I do? Only this; that I offer to go with you, if you will take me. I am your wife: why should you go alone?*"

There was no signature. She folded the paper, and placed it in an envelope, and carefully locked it up. Then she put out the light, and went back to bed again, and fell into a sound, happy, contented sleep—the untroubled sleep of a child.

Then in the morning—how bright and light-hearted she was!

Anneli could not understand this change that had suddenly come over her young mistress. She said little; but there was a happy light on her face; she sang, "Du Schwert an meiner Linken," in snatches, as she was dressing her hair. And she presented Anneli with a necklace of Turkish silver coins.

She was down at the South Kensington Museum considerably before eleven o'clock. She idly walked Anneli through the various rooms, pointing out to her this and that; and as the

little Dresden maid had not been in the Museum before, her eyes were wide open at the sight of such beautiful things. She was shown masses of rich tapestry, and cases of Japanese lacquer-work; she was shown collections of ancient jewellery and glass; she went by sunny English landscapes; and was told the story of solemn cartoons. In the midst of it all George Brand appeared; and the little German girl, of her own accord, and quite as deftly as Madame Potecki, devoted herself to the study of some screens of water-colours, just as if she were one of the Royal Academy pupils.

"We have been looking over Madame Potecki's treasures once more," said Natalie: he was struck by the happy brightness of her face.

"Ah, indeed," said he; and he went and brought a couple of chairs, that together they might regard, if they were so minded, one of those vast cartoons. "Well, I have good news, Natalie. I do not start until a clear week hence. So we shall have six mornings here—six mornings all to ourselves. Do you know what that means to me?"

She took the chair he offered her. She did

not look appalled by this intelligence of his early departure.

"It means six more days of happiness; and do you not think I shall look back on them with gratitude? And there is not to be a word said about my going. No; it is understood that we cut off the past and the future for these six days. We are here; we can speak to each other; that is enough."

"But how can one help thinking of the future?" said she, with a mock mournfulness. "You are going away, alone."

"No, not quite alone."

She looked up quickly.

"Why, you know what Evelyn is—the best-hearted of friends," he said to her. "He insists on going over to America with me; and even talks of remaining a year or two. He pretends to be anxious to study American politics."

He could not understand why she laughed—though it was a short, quick, hysterical laugh, very near to tears.

"You remind me of one of Mr. Browning's poems," she said, half in apology. "It is about a man who has a friend and a sweetheart. You don't remember it, perhaps?"

He thought for a moment.

"The fact is," he said, "that when I think of Browning's poems, all along the line of them, there are some of them seem to burn like fire, and I cannot see the others."

"This is a very modest little one," said she. "It is a poor poet starving in a garret; and he tells you he has a friend beyond the sea; and he knows that if he were to fall ill, and to wake up out of his sickness, he would find his friend there, tending him like the gentlest of nurses, even though he got nothing but grumblings about his noisy boots. And the—the poor fellow——"

She paused for a second.

"—He goes on to tell about his sweetheart—who has ruined him—to whom he has sacrificed his life and his peace and fame—and what would she do? He says—

> 'She
> —I'll tell you,—calmly would decree
> That I should roast at a slow fire,
> If that would compass her desire
> And make her one whom they invite
> To the famous ball to-morrow night.'

That is—the difference—between a friend and a sweetheart——"

He did not notice that she spoke rather uncertainly; and that her eyes were wet.

"What do you mean, Natalie?"

"That it is a good thing for you that you have a friend. There is one, at all events—who will—who will not let you go away alone."

"My darling!" he said, "what new notion is this you have got into your head? You do not blame yourself for that, too? Why, you see, it is a very simple thing for Lord Evelyn, who is an idle man, and has no particular ties binding him, to spend a few months in the States; and when he once finds out that the voyage across is one of the pleasantest holidays a man can take, I have no doubt I shall see him often enough. Now, don't let us talk any more about that—except this one point. Have you promised your father that you will not write to me?"

"Oh no; how could I?"

"And I may write to you?"

"I shall live from week to week expecting your letters," she said simply.

"Then we shall not say another word about it," said he, lightly. "We have six days to be together: no one can rob us of them. Come,

shall we go and have a look at the English porcelain that is on this floor? We have whole heaps of old Chelsea and Crown Derby and that kind of thing at the Beeches: I think I must try and run down there before I go, and send you some. What use is it to me?"

"Oh no, I hope you won't do that," she said, quickly, as she rose.

"You don't care about it, perhaps?"

She seemed embarrassed for a moment.

"For old china?" she said, after a moment. "Oh, yes, I do. But—but—I think you may find something happen that would make it unnecessary—I mean it is very kind of you—but I hope you will not think of sending me any."

"What do you mean? What is about to happen?"

"It is all a mystery and a secret as yet," she said, with a smile. She seemed so much more light-hearted than she had been the day before.

Then, as they walked by those cases, and admired this or that, she would recur to this forthcoming departure of his, despite of him. And she was not at all sad about it. She was curious; that was all. Was there any difficulty in getting

a cabin at short notice? It was from Liverpool the big steamers sailed, was it not? And it was a very different thing, she understood, travelling in one of those huge vessels, and crossing the Channel in a little cockle-shell. He would no doubt make many friends on board. Did single ladies ever make the voyage? Could a single lady and her maid get a cabin to themselves? It would not be so very tedious, if one could get plenty of books? And so forth; and so forth. She did not study the Chelsea shepherdesses very closely.

"I'll tell you what I wish you would do, Natalie," said he.

"I will do it," she answered.

"When Lord Evelyn comes back—some day I wish you would take Anneli with you for a holiday—and Evelyn would take you down to have a look over the Beeches. You could be back the same night. I should like you to see my mother's portrait."

She did not answer.

"Will you do that?"

"You will know before long," she said, in low voice, "why I need not promise that to you.

But that, or anything else, I am willing to do, if you wish it."

The precious moments sped quickly. And as they walked through the almost empty rooms—how silent these were, with the occasional foot-falls on the tiled floors, and once or twice the distant sounding of a bell outside!—again and again he protested against her saying another word about his going away. What did it matter? Once the pain of parting was over, what then? He had a glad work before him. She must not for a moment think she had anything to do with it. And could he regret that he had ever met her, when he would have these six mornings of happy inter-communion to think over, when the wide seas separated them?

"Natalie," said he, reproachfully, "do you forget the night you and I heard *Fidelio* together? And you think I shall regret ever having seen you."

She smiled to herself. Her hand clasped a certain envelope that he could not see.

Then the time came for their seeking out Anneli. But as they were going through the twilight of a corridor, she stopped him; and her

usually frank eyes were downcast. She took out that envelope.

"Dearest," said she, almost inaudibly, "this is something I wish you to read after Anneli and I are gone. I think you will—you will not misunderstand me. If you think—it is—it is too bold, you will remember that I have no mother to advise me; and—and you will be kind; and not answer. Then I shall know."

Ten minutes thereafter, he was standing alone, in the broad daylight outside, reading the lines she had written early that morning; and in every one of them he read the firm and noble character of the woman he loved. He was almost bewildered by the proud-spirited frankness of her message to him; and involuntarily he thought of the poor devil of a poet in the garret who spoke of his faithful friend and his worthless mistress.

"One is fortunate indeed to have a friend like Evelyn," he said to himself. "But when one has, besides that, the love of a woman like this—then the earth holds something worth living for."

He looked at the brief, proud, pathetic message again—"*I am your wife: why should you go alone?*" It was Natalie herself speaking in every word.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTERVENTION.

THE more that Madame Potecki thought over the communication made to her by Natalie the more alarmed she became. Her pupils received but a very mechanical sort of guidance that afternoon. All through the "One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four" she was haunted by an uneasy consciousness that her protests had not been nearly strong enough. The girl had not seemed in the least impressed by her counsel. And suppose this wild project were indeed carried out, might not she, that is, Madame Potecki, be regarded as an accomplice if she remained silent and did not intervene?

On the other hand, although she and Ferdinand Lind were friends of many years' standing, she had never quite got over a certain fear of him. She guessed pretty well what underlay that

pleasant, plausible exterior of his. And she was not at all sure that, if she went to Mr. Lind and told him that in such and such circumstances his daughter meant to go to America as the wife of George Brand, the first outburst of his anger might not fall on herself. She was an intermeddler. What concern of hers was it? He might even accuse her of having connived at the whole affair, especially during his absence in Philadelphia.

But after all the little Polish lady was exceedingly fond of this girl; and she resolved to go at all hazards and see whether something could not be done to put matters straight. She would call at the chambers in Lisle Street and make sure of seeing Mr. Lind alone. She would venture to remind him that his daughter was grown-up, a woman, not to be treated as a child. As she had been altogether on the father's side in arguing with Natalie, so she would be altogether on the daughter's side in making these representations to Mr. Lind. Perhaps some happy compromise would result.

She was, however, exceedingly nervous when, on the following afternoon, she called at Lisle Street and was preceded upstairs by the stout

old German. In the room into which she was shown Reitzei was seated. Reitzei received her very graciously; they were old friends. But although Madame Potecki on ordinary occasions was fond of listening to the sound of her own voice, she seemed now quite incapable of saying anything. Reitzei had been fortunate enough to hear the new baritone sing at a private house on the previous evening; she did not even ask what impression had been produced.

Then Mr. Lind came into the room; and Reitzei left.

"How do you do, Madame Potecki?" said he, somewhat curtly.

She took it that he was offended because she had come on merely private affairs to his place of business; and this did not tend to lessen her embarrassment. However, she made a brave plunge,

"You are surprised," she said, "to find me calling upon you here, are you not? Yes; but I will explain. You see, my dear friend, I wished to see you alone——"

"Yes, yes, Madame Potecki. I understand. What is your news?"

"It is — about Natalie," she managed to say; and then all the methods of beginning that she had studied went clean out of her mind; and she was reduced to an absolute silence.

He did not seem in the least impatient.

"Yes; about Natalie?" he repeated, taking up a paper-knife, and beginning to write imaginary letters on the leather of the desk before him.

"You will say to me, 'Why do you interfere?'" the little woman managed to say at last. "Meddlers do harm; they are not thanked. But then, my dear friend, Natalie is like my own child to me; for her what would I not do?"

Mr. Lind could not fail to see that his visitor was very nervous and agitated: perhaps it was to give her time to compose herself that he said leisurely—

"Yes, Madame Potecki; I know that you and she are great friends. And it is a good thing that the child should have some one to keep her company; perhaps she is a little too much alone. Well, what do you wish to say about her? You run no risk with me. You will not be misunderstood. I know you are not likely to say anything unkind about Natalie."

"Unkind!" she exclaimed; and now she had recovered herself somewhat. "Who could do that? Oh no, my dear friend. Oh no."

Here there was another awkward pause.

"My dear Madame Potecki," said Mr. Lind, with a smile, "shall I speak for you? You do not like to say what you have come to say. Shall I speak for you? This is it; is it not? You have become aware of that entanglement that Natalie has got into. Very well. Perhaps she has told you. Perhaps she has told you also that I have forbidden her to have any communication with—well, let us speak frankly, Mr. Brand. Very well; you go with her to the South Kensington Museum; you meet Mr. Brand there. Naturally you think if that comes to my ears I shall suspect you of having planned the meeting; and you would rather come and assure me that you had nothing to do with it. Is it so?"

"My dear friend," said Madame Potecki, quickly, "I did not come to you about myself at all! What am I? What matters what happens to an old woman like me? It is not about myself—it is about Natalie—that I have come to you. Ah, the dear, beautiful child!—how can one

see her unhappy, and not try to do something? Why should she be unhappy? She is young, beautiful, loving; my dear friend, do you wonder that she has a sweetheart? And one who is so worthy of her, too: one who is not selfish, who has courage, who will be kind to her. Then I said to myself, 'Ah, what a pity to have father and daughter opposed to each other.' Why might not one step in and say, 'Come and be friends. You love each other: do not have this coldness that makes a young heart so miserable!'"

She had talked quickly and eagerly at last; she was trembling with excitement; she had her eyes fixed on his face to catch the first symptom of acquiescence.

But, on the contrary, Mr. Lind remained quite impassive; and he said coldly—

"This is a different matter altogether, Madame Potecki. I do not blame you for interfering; but I must tell you at once that your interference is not likely to be of much use. You see, there are reasons, which I cannot explain to you, but which are very serious, why any proposal of marriage between Mr. Brand and Natalie is not to be entertained for a moment. The thing is quite

impossible. Very well. She knows this; she knows that I wish all communication between them to cease; nevertheless she says she will see him every day until he goes. How can you wonder that she is unhappy? Is it not her own doing?"

"If she was in reality my child, that is not the way I would speak," said the little woman, boldly.

"Unfortunately, my dear Madame Potecki," said Mr. Lind, blandly, "I cannot, as I say, explain to you the reasons which make such a marriage impossible; or you yourself would say it was impossible. Very well, then. If you wish to do a service to your friend Natalie—if you wish to see her less unhappy—you know what advice to give her. A girl who perseveres in wilful disobedience is not likely to be very contented in her mind."

Madame Potecki sat silent and perplexed. This man seemed so firm, so reasonable, so assured; it was apparently hopeless to expect any concession from him. And yet what was the use of her going away merely to repeat the advice she had already given?

"And in any case," he continued lightly, "it

is not an affair for you to be deeply troubled about, my dear Madame Potecki. On the contrary, it is a circumstance of little moment. If Natalie chooses to indulge this sentiment—well, the fate of empires does not hang on it; and in a little while it will be all right. Youth soon recovers from small disappointments; the girl is not morbid or melancholy. Moreover, she has plenty to occupy her mind with: do not fear that she will be permanently unhappy."

All this gave Natalie's friend but scant consolation. She knew something of the girl; she knew it was not a light matter that had made her resolve to share banishment with her lover rather than that he should depart alone.

"Yes, she is acting contrary to my wishes," continued Mr. Lind, who saw that his visitor was anxious and chagrined. "But why should you vex yourself with that, my dear madame? Why, indeed? It is only for a few days. When Mr. Brand leaves for America, then she will settle down to her old ways. This episode of sentiment will soon be forgotten. Do not fear for your friend Natalie; she has a healthy constitution; she is not likely to sigh away her life."

"But you do not understand, Mr. Lind!" Madame Potecki exclaimed suddenly. "You do not understand. When he leaves for America, there is to be an end? No! You are not aware, then, that if he goes to America, Natalie will go also?"

She had spoken quickly, breathlessly; not taking much notice of her words. But she was appalled by the effect they produced. Lind started, as if he had been struck; and for a second, as he regarded her, the eyes set under the heavy brows burned like coals; and she noticed a curious paleness in his face, especially in the lips. But this lasted only for an instant. When he spoke, he was quite calm; and was apparently considering each word.

"Are you authorized to bring me this message?" he said, slowly.

"Oh no! oh no!" the little woman exclaimed. "I assure you, my dear friend, I came to you because I thought something was about to happen — something that might be prevented. Ah, you don't know how I love that darling child —and to see her unhappy—and resolved perhaps to make some great mistake in her life—how could I help interfering?"

"So," continued Lind, apparently weighing every word, "this is what she is bent on? If Brand goes to America, she will go with him?"

"I—I—am afraid so," stammered Madame Potecki. "That is what I gathered from her—though it was only an imaginary case she spoke of. But she was pale—and trembling—and how could I stand by and not do something?"

He did not answer; his lips were firm set. Unconsciously he was pressing the point of the paper-knife into the leather; it snapped in two. He threw the pieces aside; and said, with a sudden lightness of manner—

"Ah, well, my dear madame, you know young people are sometimes very headstrong, and difficult to manage. We must see what can be done in this case. You have not told Natalie you were coming to me?"

"No. She asked me at first; then she said she would tell you herself."

He regarded her for a second.

"There is no reason why you should say you have been here?"

"Perhaps not, perhaps not," Madame Potecki said, doubtfully. "No; there is no necessity.

But if one were sure that the dear child were to be made any happier——"

She did not complete the sentence.

"I think you may leave the whole affair in my hands, my dear Madame Potecki," said Lind, in his usual courteous fashion. He spoke, indeed, as if it were a matter of the most trifling importance. "I think I can promise you that Natalie shall not be allowed to imperil the happiness of her life by taking any rash step. In the mean time, I am your debtor that you have come and told me. It was considerate of you, Madame Potecki; I am obliged to you."

The little woman was practically dismissed. She rose—still doubtful—and hesitated. But what more could she say?

"I am not to tell her, then?" she said.

"If you please, not."

When he had graciously bowed her out, he returned to his seat at the desk; and then the forced courtesy of his manner was abandoned. His brows gathered down; his lips were again firm set; he bent one of the pieces of the paper-knife until that snapped too. And when some one knocked at the door, he answered sharply in German.

It was Gathorne Edwards who entered.

"Well, you have got back?" he said, with but scant civility. "Where is Calabressa?"

The tall, pale, stooping man looked round with some caution.

"There is no one—no one but Reitzei," said Lind, impatiently.

"Calabressa is detained in Naples — the General's orders," said the other, in rather a low voice. "I did not write—I thought it was not safe to put anything on paper. More especially as we discovered that Kirski was being watched."

"No wonder," said Lind, scornfully. "A fool of a madman being taken about by a fool of a mountebank!"

Edwards stared at him. Surely this man, who was usually the most composed, and impenetrable, and suave of men, must have been considerably annoyed thus to give way to a petulant temper.

"But the result, Edwards: well?"

"Refused."

Lind laughed, sardonically.

"Who could have doubted? Of course the Council do not think that I approved of that mad scheme?"

"At all events, sir," said Edwards, submissively, "you permitted it."

"Permitted it! Yes; to please old Calabressa, who imagines himself a diplomatist. But who could have doubted what the end would be? Well—what further?"

"I understand that a message is on its way to you from the Council," said the other, speaking in still lower tones, "giving further instructions. They consider it of great importance that—it—should be done by one of the English section; so that no one may imagine it arises from a private revenge."

Lind was toying with one of the pieces of the broken paper-knife.

"Zaccatelli has had the warning," Edwards continued. "Granaglia took it. The Cardinal is mad with fright—will do anything."

Lind seemed to rouse himself with an effort.

"I beg your pardon, friend Edwards. I did not hear. What were you saying?"

"I was saying that the Cardinal had had the decree announced to him; and is mad with fear; and he will do anything. He offers thirty thousand lire a year; not only that, but he will try to get his

Holiness to give his countenance to the Society. Fancy, as Calabressa says, what the world would say to an alliance between the Vatican and the Society of the SEVEN STARS!"

Lind seemed incapable of paying attention to this new visitor; so absorbed was he in his own thoughts. He had again to rouse himself forcibly.

"Yes," he said, "you were saying, friend Edwards, that the Starving Cardinal had become aware of the decree. Yes; well, then?"

"Did you not hear, sir? He thinks there should be an alliance between the Vatican and the Society."

"His Eminence is jocular, considering how near he is to the end of his life," said Lind, absently.

"Further," Edwards continued, "he has sent back the daughter of old De Bedros, who it seems first claimed the decree against him. And he is to give her a dowry of ten thousand lire when she marries. But all these promises and proposals do not seem to have weighed much with the Council."

Here Edwards stopped. He perceived plainly

that Lind—who sat with his brows drawn down, and a sombre look on his face—was not listening to him at all. Presently Lind rose, and said—

"My good Edwards, I have some business of serious importance to attend to at once. Now you will give me the report of your journey some other time. To-night? At nine o'clock?"

"Yes, sir; if that will suit you."

"Can you come to my house in Curzon Street, at nine?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Very well. I am your debtor. But stay a moment. Of course I understand from you that nothing that has happened interferes with the decree against our excellent friend the Cardinal?"

"So it appears."

"The Council are not to be bought over by idle promises?"

"Apparently not."

"Very well. Then you will come to-night at nine; in my little study there will be no interruption; you can give me all the details of your holiday. Ha, my friend Edwards," he added, more pleasantly, as he opened the door for his visitor, "would it not be better for you to give up

that Museum altogether, and come over to us? Then you would have many a pleasant little trip."

"I suspect the Museum is most likely to give me up," said Edwards, with a laugh, as he descended the narrow twilit stairs.

Then Lind returned to his desk, and sat down. A quarter of an hour afterwards, when Reitzei came into the room, he found him still sitting there, without any papers whatsoever before him. The angry glance that Lind directed to him as he entered told him that the master did not wish to be disturbed; so he picked up a book of reference by way of excuse, and retreated into the further room, leaving Lind once more alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ENCOUNTER.

This was an October morning, in the waning of the year; and yet so bright and clear and fresh was it, even in the middle of London, that one could have imagined the Spring had returned. The world was full of a soft diffused light, from the pale clouds sailing across the blue to the sheets of silver widening out on the broad bosom of the Thames; but here and there the sun caught some shining surface—the lip of a marble fountain, the glass of a lamp on the Embankment, or the harness of some merchant-prince's horses prancing in to town—and these were sharp jewel-like gleams amid the vague general radiance. The air was sweet and clear; the white steam blown from the engines on Hungerford Bridge showed that the wind was westerly. Two lovers walked below, in the Embankment gardens, probably listening but little to the murmur of the great

city around them. Surely the Spring had come again; and youth and love and hope? The solitary occupant of this chamber that overlooked the gardens and the shining river did not stay to ask why his heart should be so full of gladness—why this beautiful morning should yield him so much delight. He was thinking chiefly that on such a morning Natalie would be abroad soon; she loved the sunlight and the sweet air.

It was far too fine a morning, indeed, to spend in a Museum, even with all Madame Potecki's treasures spread out before one. So, instead of going to South Kensington, he went straight up to Curzon Street. Early as he was, he was not too early, for he was leisurely walking along the pavement when, ahead of him, he saw Natalie and her little maid come forth and set out westward. He allowed them to reach the Park gates; then he overtook them. Anneli fell a little way behind.

Now, whether it was that the brightness of the morning had raised her spirits, or that she had been reasoning herself into a more courageous frame of mind, it was soon very clear that Natalie was not at all so anxious and embarrassed as

she had shown herself the day before when they parted.

"There was no letter from you this morning," she said, with a smile—though she did not look up into his face. "Then I have offered myself to you; and am refused?"

"How could I write?" he said. "I tried once or twice; and then I saw I must wait until I could tell you face to face all that I think of your bravery and your goodness. And now that I see you, Natalie, it is not a bit better: I can't tell you: I am so happy to be near you, to be beside you, and hear your voice, that I don't think I can say anything at all."

"I am refused, then?" said she, shyly.

"Refused!" he exclaimed. "There are some things one cannot refuse—like the sunshine. But do you know what a terrible sacrifice you are making?'

"It is you, then, who are making no sacrifice at all," she said, reproachfully. "What do I sacrifice more than every girl must sacrifice when she marries? England is not my home as it is your home; we have lived everywhere; I have no childhood's friends to leave, as many a girl has."

"Your father——?"

"After a little while my father will scarcely miss me; he is too busy."

But presently she added—

"If you had remained in England, I should never have been your wife."

"Why?" he said, with some surprise.

"I should never have married against my father's wishes," she said, thoughtfully. "No. My promise to you was that I would be your wife or the wife of no one. I would have kept that promise. But as long as we could have seen each other, and been with each other from time to time, I don't think I could have married against my father's wish. Now it is quite different. Your going to America has changed it all. Ah, my dear friend, you don't know what I suffered one or two nights before I could decide what was right for me to do."

"I can guess," he said in a low voice, in answer to that brief sigh of hers.

Then she grew more cheerful in manner.

"But that is all over. And now am I accepted? I think you are like Naomi: it was only when she saw that Ruth was very determined to go with

her that she left off protesting. And I am to consider America as my future home? Well, at all events, one will be able to breathe freely there. It is not a country weighed down with standing armies and conscriptions and fortifications. How could one live in a town like Coblenz, or Metz, or Brest? The poor wretches marching this way and marching that—you watch them from your hotel window—the young men and the middle-aged men—and you know that they would rather be away at their farms, or in their factories, or saw-pits or engine-houses, working for their wives and children——"

"Natalie," said he, with a smile, "you are only half a woman: you don't care about military glory."

"It is the most mean, the most cruel and contemptible thing under the sun!" she said, passionately. "What is the quality that makes a great hero—a great general—now-a-days? Courage? Not a bit. It is callousness!—an absolute indifference to the slaughtering of human lives. You sit in your tent—you sit on horseback—miles away from the fighting; and if the poor wretches are being destroyed here or there in too great quan-

tities—if they are ridden down by the horses and torn to pieces by the mitrailleuses—' Oh, clap on another thousand or two : the place must be taken at all risks.' Yes; indeed; but not much risk to you! For if you fail, if all the thousands of men have been hurled against the stone and lead only to be thrown back crushed and murdered—why, you have fought with great courage—*you*, the great general, sitting in your saddle miles away, it is *you* who have shown extraordinary courage!—but numbers were against you; and if you win, you have shown still greater courage; and the audacity of the movement was so-and-so; and your dogged persistence was so-and-so; and you get another star for your breast; and all the world sings your praises. And who is to court-martial a great hero for reckless waste of human life? Who is to tell him that he is a cruel-hearted coward? Who is to take him to the fields he has saturated with blood, and compel him to count the corpses; or take him to the homesteads he has ruined throughout the land, and ask the women and the sons and the daughters what they think of his marvellous courage? Oh no; he is away back at the capital—there is a triumphal procession; all

we want now is another war-tax—for the peasant must pay with his money as well as with his blood—and another levy of the young men to be taken away and killed!"

This was always a sore point with Natalie; and he did not seek to check her enthusiasm with any commonplace and obvious criticisms. When she got into one of these moods of proud indignation—which was not seldom—he loved her all the more. There was something in the ring of her voice that touched him to the heart. Such noble, quick, generous sympathy seemed to him far too beautiful and rare a thing to be met by argument and analysis. When he heard that pathetic tremulousness in her voice, he was ready to believe anything. When he looked at the proud lips and the moistened eyes, what cause that had won such eloquent advocacy would he not have espoused?

"Ah, well, Natalie," said he, "some day the mass of the people of the earth will be brought to see that all that can be put a stop to, if they so choose. They have the power: *Zahlen regieren die Welt.* And how can one be better employed than in spreading abroad knowledge and showing

the poorer people of the earth how the world might be governed if they would only ally themselves together? It would be more easy to persuade them if we had all of us your voice and your enthusiasm."

"Mine?" she said. "A woman's talking is not likely to be of much use. But," she added rather hesitatingly—"at least—she can give her sympathy—and her love—to those who are doing the real work."

"And I am going to earn yours, Natalie," said he, cheerfully, "to such a degree as you have never dreamt of, when you and I together are away in the New World. And that reminds me: now you must not be frightened; but there is a little difficulty. Of course you thought of nothing—when you wrote those lines—but of doing a kindness; that was like you; your heart speaks quickly. Well—— "

He himself seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"You see, Natalie, there would be no difficulty at all if you and I could get married within the next few days."

Her eyes were cast down; and she was silent.

"You don't think it possible you could get your father to consent?" he said; but without much hope.

"Oh no; I think not; I fear not," she said, in a low voice.

"Then, you see, Natalie," he continued—and he spoke quite lightly, as if it was merely an affair of a moment—"there would be this little awkwardness: you are not of age—unless you get your father's consent, you cannot marry until you are twenty-one. It is not a long time—— "

"I did not think of it," she said, very hurriedly, and even breathlessly. "I only thought it—it seemed hard you should go away alone—and I considered myself already your wife—and I said, 'What ought I to do?' And now—now you will tell me what to do. I do not know—I have no one to ask."

"Do you think," said he, after a pause, "that you would forget me, if you were to remain two years in England while I was in America?"

She regarded him for a moment with those large, true eyes of hers; and she did not answer in words.

"There is another way; but—it is asking too much," he said.

"What is it?" she said, calmly.

"I was thinking," he said, with some hesitation, "that if I could bribe Madame Potecki to leave her music-lessons—and take charge of you—and bring you to America—and you and she might live there until you were twenty-one—but I see it is impossible. It is too selfish. I should not have thought of it. What are two years, Natalie?"

The girl answered nothing; she was thinking deeply. When she next spoke, it was about Lord Evelyn, and of the probability of his crossing to the States, and remaining there for a year or two. And she wanted to know more about the great country beyond the seas. And what was Philadelphia like?

Well, it was not to be expected that these two, so busy with their own affairs, were likely to notice much that was passing around them, as the forenoon sped rapidly away, and Natalie had to think of getting home again. But the little German maidservant was not so engrossed. She was letting her clear observant blue eyes stray from the pretty young ladies riding in the Row, to the people walking under the trees, and from them again to the banks of the Serpentine, where

the dogs were barking at the ducks. In doing so she happened to look a little bit behind her; then suddenly she started; and said to herself, '*Herr Je!*' But the little maid had her wits about her. She pretended to have seen nothing. Gradually, however, she lessened the distance between herself and her young mistress; then, when she was quite up to her, and walking abreast with her, she said in a low quick voice—

"Fräulein! Fräulein!"

"What is it, Anneli?"

George Brand was listening too. He wondered that the girl seemed so excited, and yet spoke low, and kept her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Ah, do not look round, Fräulein!" said she, in the same hurried way. "Do not look round! But it is the lady—who gave you the locket. She is walking by the lake. She is watching you."

Natalie did not look round. She turned to her companion, and said, without any agitation whatever—

"Do you remember, dearest? I showed you the locket; and told you about my mysterious visitor. Now Anneli says she is walking by the side of the lake. I may go and speak to her,

may I not? Because it was so wicked of Calabressa to say some one had stolen the locket, and wished to restore it after many years. I never had any such locket."

She was talking quite carelessly; it was Brand himself who was most perturbed. He knew well who that stranger must be, if Anneli's sharp eyes had not deceived her.

"No, Natalie," he said, quickly, "you must not go and speak to her. And do not look round, either. Perhaps she does not wish to be seen. Perhaps she would go away. Leave it to me, my darling; I will find out all about her for you."

"But it is very strange," said the girl. "I shall begin to be afraid of this emissary of Santa Claus if she continues to be so mysterious. And I do not like mystery: I think, dearest, I must go and speak to her. She cannot mean me any harm. She has brought me flowers again and again on my birthday—if it is the same. She gave me the little locket I showed you. Why may not I stop and speak to her?"

"Not now, my darling," he said, putting his hand on her arm. "Let me find out about her first."

"And how are you going to do that? In a few minutes, perhaps, she goes away; and when will you see her again? It is many months since Anneli saw her last; and Anneli sees everything and everybody."

"We will cross the bridge," said he, in a low voice—for he knew not how near the stranger might be—"and walk on to Park Lane. Anneli must tell us how far she follows. If she turns aside anywhere, I will bid you good-bye and see where she goes. Do you understand, Natalie?"

She certainly did not understand why he should speak so seriously about it.

"And I am to be marched like a prisoner? I may not turn my head?"

She began to be amused. He scarcely knew what to say to her. At last he said, earnestly—

"Natalie, it is of great importance to you that I should see this lady—that I should try to see her. Do as I bid you, my dearest."

"Then you know who she is?" said Natalie, promptly.

"I have a suspicion, at all events. And—and—something may happen—that you will be glad of."

"What, more mysterious presents?" the girl said, lightly. "More messages from Santa Claus?"

He could not answer her. The consciousness that this might be indeed Natalie's mother who was so near to them—the fear of the possible consequences of any sudden disclosure—the thought that this opportunity might escape him, and he leaving in a few days for America—all these things whirled through his brain in rapid and painful succession. But there was soon to be an end of them. Natalie, still obediently following his instructions, and yet inclined to make light of the whole thing, and himself arrived at the gates of the Park; Anneli, as formerly, being somewhat behind. Receiving no intimation from her, they crossed the road, to the corner of Great Stanhope Street. But they had not proceeded far when Anneli said—

"Ah, Fräulein, the lady has gone. You may look after her now. See!"

That was enough for George Brand. He had no difficulty in making out the dark figure that Anneli indicated; and he was in no great hurry, for he feared the stranger might discover that she was being followed. But he breathed

more freely when he had bidden good-bye to Natalie, and seen her set out home.

He leisurely walked up Park Lane, keeping an eye from time to time on the figure in black, but not paying too strict attention, lest she should turn suddenly and observe him. In this way he followed her up to Oxford Street; and there, in the more crowded thoroughfare, he lessened the distance between them considerably. He also watched more closely now, and with a strange interest. From the graceful carriage, the beautiful figure, he was almost convinced that that indeed was Natalie's mother; and he began to wonder what he would say to her—how he would justify his interference.

The stranger stopped at a door next a shop in the Edgware Road; knocked, waited, and was admitted. Then the door was shut again.

It was obviously a private lodging-house. He took a half-crown in his hand, to bribe the maid-servant; and walked boldly up to the door, and knocked. It was not a maidservant who answered, however,; it was a man who looked something like an English butler; and yet there was a foreign touch about his dress: probably,

Brand thought, the landlord. Brand pulled out a card-case, and pretended to have some difficulty in getting a card from it.

"The lady who came in just now——" he said, still looking at the cards.

"Madame Berezolyi? Yes, sir?"

His heart jumped. But he calmly took out a pencil, and wrote on one of the cards, in French—'*One who knows your daughter would like to see you.*'

"Will you be so kind as to take up that card to Madame Berezolyi? I think she will see me. I will wait here till you come down."

The man returned in a couple of minutes.

"Madame Berezolyi will be pleased to see you, sir: will you step this way?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOTHER.

THIS beautiful, pale, trembling mother: she stood there, dark against the light of the window; but even in the shadow how singularly like she was to Natalie, in the tall, slender, elegant figure, the proud set of the head, the calm, intellectual brows, and the large, tender, dark eyes, as soft and pathetic as those of a doe. Only this woman's face was worn and sad; and her hair was silver-grey.

She was greatly agitated, and for a second or two incapable of speech. But when he began in French, to apologize for his intrusion, she eagerly interrupted him.

"Ah, no, no," she said, in the same tongue. "Do not waste words in apology. You have come to tell me about my child, my Natalie: Heaven will bless you for it; it is a great kindness. To

day I saw you walking with her—listening to her voice—ah, how I envied you! And once or twice I thought of going to her, and taking her hand, and saying only one word—'Natalushka!'"

"That would have been a great imprudence," said he, gravely. "If you wish to speak to your daughter——"

"If I wish to speak to her!—if I wish to speak to her!" she exclaimed; and there were tears in her voice, if there were none in the sad eyes.

"You forget, madame, that your daughter has been brought up in the belief that you died when she was a mere infant. Consider the effect of any sudden disclosure."

"But has she never suspected? I have passed her; she has seen me. I gave her a locket: what did she think?"

"She was puzzled, yes; but how could it occur to the girl that any one would be so cruel as to conceal from her all those years the fact that her mother was alive?"

"Then you yourself, monsieur?"

"I knew from Calabressa."

"Ah, my old friend Calabressa! And he

was here—in London—and he saw my Natalie. Perhaps——"

She paused for a second.

"Perhaps it was he who sent me the message. I heard—it was only a word or two—that my daughter had found a lover."

She regarded him. She had the same calm fearlessness of look that dwelt in Natalie's eyes.

"You will pardon me, monsieur. Do I guess right? It is to you that my child has given her love?"

"That is my happiness," said he. "I wish I were better worthy of it."

She still regarded him, very earnestly, and in silence.

"When I heard," she said, at length, in a low voice, "that my Natalie had given her love to a stranger, my heart sank. I said, 'More than ever is she away from me now.' And I wondered what the stranger might be like; and whether he would be kind to her. Now that I see you, I am not so sad. There is something in your voice—in your look—that tells me to have confidence in you: you will be kind to Natalie."

She seemed to be thinking aloud. And yet

he was not embarrassed by this confession, nor yet by her earnest look; he perceived how all her thoughts were really concentrated on her daughter.

"Her father approves?" said this sad-faced, grey-haired woman.

"Oh no; quite the contrary."

"But he is kind to her?" she said, quickly and anxiously.

"Oh yes," he answered. "No doubt. He is kind to her. Who could be otherwise?"

She had been so agitated at the beginning of this interview that she had allowed her visitor to remain standing. She now asked him to be seated; and took a chair opposite to him. Her nervousness had in a great measure disappeared; though at times she clasped the fingers of both hands together, as if to force herself to be composed.

"You will tell me all about it, monsieur; that I may know what to say, when I speak to my child at last. Ah, heavens, if you could understand how full my heart is: sixteen years of silence! Think what a mother has to say to her only child after that time. It was cruel—cruel—cruel!"

A little convulsive sob was the only sign of her emotion; and the fingers were clasped together.

"Pardon me, madame," said he, with some hesitation. "But, you see, I do not know the circumstances——"

"You do not know why I dared not speak to my own daughter?" she said, looking up in surprise. "Calabressa did not tell you?"

"No. There were some hints. I did not understand."

"Nor of the reasons that forced me to comply with such an inhuman demand? Alas, these reasons exist no longer. I have done my duty to one whose life was sacred to me; now his death has released me from fear; I come to my daughter now. Ah, when I fold her to my heart, what shall I say to her—what but this?—'Natalushka, if your mother has remained away from you all these years, it was not because she did not love you.'"

He drew his chair nearer, and took her hand.

"I perceive that you have suffered, and deeply. But your daughter will make amends to you. She

loves you now; you are a saint to her; your portrait is her dearest possession——"

"My portrait?" she said, looking rather bewildered. "Her father has not forbidden her that, then?"

"It was Calabressa who gave it to her, quite recently."

She gently withdrew her hand; and glanced at the table, on which two books lay; and sighed.

"The English tongue is so difficult!" she said. "And I have so much—so much—to say! I have written out many things that I wish to tell her; and have repeated them, and repeated them; but the sound is not right—the sound is not like what my heart wishes to say to her."

"Reassure yourself, madame, on that point," said he, cheerfully. "I should imagine there is scarcely any language in Europe that your daughter does not know something of. You will not have to speak English to her at all."

She looked up, with a bright eagerness in her eyes.

"But not Magyar?"

"I do not know for certain," he said, "for I don't know Magyar myself; but I am almost

convinced she must know it. She has told me so much about her countrymen that used to come about the house; yes, surely they would speak Magyar."

A strange, happy light came into the woman's face; she was communing with herself—perhaps going over mentally some tender phrases full of the soft vowel-sounds of the Magyar tongue.

"That," said she, presently, and in a low voice, "would be my crowning joy. I have thought of what I should say to her, in many languages; but always 'My daughter, I love you,' did not have the right sound. In our own tongue, it goes to the heart. I am no longer afraid: my girl will understand me."

"I should think," said he, "you will not have to speak much, to assure her of your love."

She seemed to become a great deal more cheerful; this matter had evidently been weighing on her mind.

"Meanwhile," she said, "you promised to tell me all about Natalie and yourself. Her father does not approve of your marrying. Well, his reasons?"

"If he has any, he is careful to keep them to

himself," he said. "But I can guess at some of them. No doubt he would rather not have Natalie marry; it would deprive him of an excellent housekeeper. Then again—and this is the only reason he does give—he seems to consider it would be inexpedient as regards the work we are all engaged in——"

"You?" she said, with a sudden start. "Are you in the Society also?"

"Certainly, madame."

"What grade?"

He told her.

"Then you are helpless, if he forbids your marriage."

"On the contrary, madame. My marriage or non-marriage has nothing whatever to do with my obedience to the Society."

"He has control over Natalie."

"Until she is twenty-one," he answered, promptly.

"But," she said, regarding him with some apprehension in her eyes, "you do not say—you do not suggest—that the child is opposed to her father—that she thinks of marrying you, when she may legally do so, against his wish——?"

"My dear madame," said he, "it will be difficult for you to understand how all this affair rests until you get to know something more about Natalie herself. She is not like other girls. She has courage; she has opinions of her own: when she thinks that such and such a thing is right, she is not afraid to do it, whatever it may be. Now, she believes her father's opposition to be unjust; and—and perhaps there is something else that has influenced her—well, the fact is, I am ordered off to America—and, and the girl has a quick and generous nature; and she at once offered to share what she calls my banishment."

"To leave her father's house!" said the mother, with increasing alarm.

Brand looked at her. He could not understand this expression of anxious concern. If, as he was beginning to assure himself, Lind was the cause of that long and cruel separation between mother and daughter, why should this woman be aghast at the notion of Natalie leaving such a guardian? Or was it merely a superstitious fear of him, similar to that which seemed to possess Calabressa?

"In dealing with your daughter, madame," he

continued, "one has to be careful not to take advantage of her forgetfulness of herself. She is too willing to sacrifice herself for others. Now to-day we were talking—as she is not free to marry until she is twenty-one—about her perhaps going over to America under the guardianship of Madame Potecki——"

"Madame Potecki?"

"She is a friend of your daughter's; almost a mother to her. And I am not sure but that Natalie would willingly do that—more especially under your guardianship, in preference to that of Madame Potecki——"

"Oh no, no," she exclaimed instantly. "She must not dare her father like that. Oh, it would be terrible. I hope you will not allow her!"

"It is not a question of daring: the girl has courage enough for anything," he said, coolly. "The thing is that it would involve too great a sacrifice on her part; and I was exceedingly selfish to think of it for a moment. No; let her remain in her father's house until she is free to act as her own mistress; then, if she will come to me, I shall take care that a proper home is

provided for her. She must not be a wanderer and a stranger."

"But even then—when she is free to act—you will not ask her to disobey her father? Oh, it will be too terrible!"

Again he regarded her with amazement.

"What do you mean, madame? What is terrible? Or is it that you are afraid of him? Calabressa spoke like that."

"You do not know of what he is capable," she said, with a sigh.

"All the more reason," he said, directly, "why she should be removed from his guardianship. But permit me to say, madame, that I do not quite share your apprehensions. I have seen nothing of the bogey kind about your husband. Of course, he is a man of strong will; and he does not like to be thwarted: without that strength of character he could not have done what he has done. But he also knows that his daughter is no longer a child; and when the proper time comes you will find that his common sense will lead him to withdraw an opposition which would otherwise be futile. Do I explain myself clearly? My dear madame, have no anxiety about the future

of your daughter. When you see herself, when you speak to her, you will find that she is one who is not given to fear."

For the moment the apprehensive look left her face. She remained silent; a happier light coming into her eyes.

"She is not sad and sorrowful, then?" she said, presently.

"Oh no; she is too brave."

"What beautiful hair she has!" said this worn-faced woman with the sad eyes. "Ah, many a time I have said to myself that when I take her to my heart, I will feel the beautiful soft hair; I will stroke it; her head will lie on my bosom. And I will gather courage from her eyes; when she laughs my heart will rejoice. I have lived many years in solitude—in secret; with many apprehensions; perhaps I have grown timid and fearful; once I was not so. But I have been troubling myself with fears; I have said, 'Ah, if she looks coldly on me—if she turns away from me—then my heart will break.'"

"I do not think you have much to fear," said he, regarding the beautiful, sad face.

"I have tried to catch the sound of her voice,"

she continued, absently, and her eyes were filled with tears, "but I could not do that. But I have watched her, and followed her, and wondered. She does not seem proud and cold."

"She will not be proud or cold to you," he said, "when she is kindness and gentleness to all the world."

"And—and when shall you see her again?" she asked, timidly.

"Now," he said. "If you will permit me, I will go to her at once. I will bring her to you."

"Oh no!" she exclaimed, hastily drying her eyes. "Oh no! She must not find a sad mother, who has been crying. She will be repelled. She will think, 'I have enough of sadness.' Oh no, you must let me collect myself; I must be very brave and cheerful when my Natalie comes to me. I must make her laugh; not cry."

"Madame," said he, gravely, "I may have but a few days longer in England: do you think it is wise to put off the opportunity? You see, she must be prepared; it would be a terrible shock if she were to know suddenly. And how can one tell what may happen to-morrow or next day? At the present moment I know she is at home; I could bring her to you directly."

"Just now?" she said; and she began to tremble again. She rose and went to a mirror.

"She could not recognize herself in me. She would not believe me. And I should frighten her, with my mourning, and my sadness."

"I do not think you need fear, madame."

She turned to him eagerly.

"Perhaps you would explain to her? Ah, would you be so kind! Tell her I have seen much trouble of late. My father has just died, after years of illness; and we were kept in perpetual terror. You will tell her why I dared not go to her before—oh no! not that—not that!"

"You forget, madame, that I myself do not know."

"It is better she should not know—better she should not know!" she said, rapidly. "No, let the girl have confidence in her father, while she remains in his house. Perhaps some time she may know; perhaps some one who is a fairer judge than I will tell her the story and make excuses: it must be that there is some excuse."

"She will not want to know; she will only want to come to you."

"But half an hour: give me half an hour," she said, and she glanced round the room. "It is so poor a chamber!"

"She will not think of the chamber."

"And the little girl with her—she will remain downstairs, will she not? I wish to be alone, quite alone, with my child." Her breath came and went quickly; and she clasped her fingers tight. "Oh, monsieur, my heart will break if my child is cold to me!"

"That is the last thing you have to fear," said he; and he rose. "Now calm yourself, madame. Recollect, you must not frighten your daughter. And it will be more than half an hour before I bring her to you; it will take more than that for me to break it to her."

She rose also; but she was obviously so excited that she did not know well what she was doing. All her thoughts were about the forthcoming interview.

"You are sure she understands the Magyar?" she said again.

"No, I do not know. But why not speak in French to her?"

"It does not sound the same—it does not

sound the same: and a mother—can only—talk to her child——"

"You must calm yourself, dear madame. Do you know that your daughter believes you to have been a miracle of courage and self-reliance? What Calabressa used to say to her was this: 'Natalushka, when you are in trouble you will be brave; you will show yourself the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi.'"

"Yes, yes," she said, quickly, as she again dried her eyes, and drew herself up. "I beg you to pardon me. I have thought so much of this meeting, through all these years, that my heart beats too quickly now. But I will have no fear. She will come to me; I am not afraid; she will not turn away from me. And how am I to thank you for your great kindness?" she added, as he moved to the door.

"By being kind to Natalie when I am away in America," said he. "You will not find it a difficult task."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VELVET GLOVE.

FERDINAND LIND sat alone, after Gathorne Edwards had gone, apparently deep buried in thought. He leaned forward over his desk, his head resting on his left hand, while in his right hand he held a pencil, with which he was mechanically printing letters on a sheet of blotting-paper before him. These letters, again and again repeated, formed but one phrase: THE VELVET GLOVE. It was as if he were perpetually reminding himself, during the turnings and twistings of his sombre speculations, of the necessity of being prudent and courteous and suave. It was as if he were determined to imprint the caution on his brain—drilling it into himself—so that in no possible emergency could it be forgotten. But as his thoughts went farther afield, he began to play with the letters, as a child might. They began to assume decorations. THE VELVET GLOVE

appeared surrounded with stars; again furnished with duplicate lines; again breaking out into rays. At length he rose, tore up the sheet of blotting-paper, and rang a hand-bell twice.

Reitzei appeared.

"Where will Beratinsky be this evening?"

"At the Culturverein. He sups there."

"You and he must be here at ten. There is business of importance."

He walked across the room, and took up his hat and stick. Perhaps at this moment the caution he had been drilling into himself suggested some further word. He turned to Reitzei, who had advanced to take his place at the desk.

"I mean if that is quite convenient to you both," he said, courteously. "Eleven o'clock, if you please; or twelve?"

"Ten will be quite convenient," Reitzei said.

"The business will not take long."

"Then we can return to the Culterverein: it is an Exhibition-night: one would not like to be altogether absent."

These sombre musings had consumed some [redacted] When Lind went out, he found it had [redacted] dark; the lamps were lit; the stream of

life was flowing westward. But he seemed in no great hurry. He chose unfrequented streets; he walked slowly; there was less of the customary spring and jauntiness of his gait. In about half an hour he had reached the door of Madame Potecki's house.

He stood for some seconds there, without ringing. Then, as some one approached, he seemed to waken out of a trance. He rang sharply; and the summons was almost immediately answered.

Madame Potecki was at home, he learned, but she was dining.

"Never mind," said he, abruptly. "She will see me. Go and ask her."

A couple of minutes thereafter he was shown into the small parlour, where Madame Potecki had just risen to receive him; and by this time a singular change had come over his manner.

"I beg your pardon—I beg a thousand pardons, my dear Madame Potecki," said he, in the kindest way, "for having interrupted you. Pray continue. I shall make sure you forgive me only if you continue. Ah, that is well. Now I will take a chair also."

Madame Potecki had again seated herself, certainly; but she was far too much agitated by this unexpected visit to be able to go on with her repast. She was alarmed about Natalie.

"You are surprised, no doubt, at my coming to see you," said he, cheerfully and carelessly, "so soon after you were kind enough to call on me. But it is only about a trifle—I assure you, my dear Madame Potecki, it is only about a trifle; and I must therefore insist on your not allowing your dinner to get cold."

"But if it is about Natalie——"

"My dear madame, Natalie is very well. There is nothing to alarm you. Now you will go on with your dinner, and I will go on with my talking."

Thus constrained, Madame again addressed herself to the small banquet spread out before her, which consisted of a couple of sausages, some pickled endive, a piece of Camembert cheese, and a tiny bottle of Erlauer. Mr. Lind turned his chair to the fire, put his feet on the fender, and lay back. He was rather smartly dressed this evening; and he was pleasant in manner.

"Natalie ought to be grateful to you, madame,"

said he, lightly, "for your solicitude about her. It is not often one finds that in one who is not related by blood."

"I have no one now left in the world to love but herself," said madame. "And then, you see, my dear friend Lind, her position appeals to one: it is sad that she has no mother."

"Yes, yes," said Lind, with a trifle of impatience. "Now, you were good enough to come and tell me this afternoon, madame, about that foolish little romance that Natalie has got into her head. It was kind of you; it was well-intentioned. And after all, although that wish of hers to go to America can scarcely be serious, it is but natural that romantic ideas should get into the head of a young girl——"

"Did not I say that to her?" exclaimed Madame Potecki, eagerly. "And almost in these words too. And did not I say to her, 'Ah, my child, you must take care; you must take care!'"

"That also was good advice," said Lind, courteously. "And no doubt Natalie laid it to heart. No; I am not afraid of her doing anything very wild or reckless. She is sensible; she thinks; she has not been brought up in an atmo-

sphere of sentiment. One may say this or that, on the spur of the moment, when one is excited; but when it comes to action, one reasons, one sees what one's duty is. Natalie may have said something to you, madame, about going to America; but not with any serious intention, believe me."

"Perhaps not," said Madame Potecki, with considerable hesitation.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Lind, as he rose, and stood before the chimney-piece mirror, and arranged the ends of his gracefully tied neckerchief. "We come to another point. It was very kind of you, my dear madame, to bring me the news—to tell me something of that sort had been said. But you know what ill-natured people will remark. You get no appreciation. They call you tale-bearer."

Madame coloured slightly.

"It is ungenerous; it is not a fair requital of kindness; but that is what is said," he continued. "Now, I should not like any friend of Natalie's to incur such a charge on her account, do you perceive, madame? And, in these circumstances, do you not think that it would be better for both you and me to consider that you

did not visit me this afternoon; that I know nothing of what idle foolishness Natalie has been talking? Would not that be better? As for me, I am dumb."

"Oh, very well, my dear friend," said Madame, quickly. "I would not for the world have Natalie or any one think that I was a mischief-maker—oh no! And did I not promise to you that I should say nothing of my having called on you to-day? It is already a promise."

He turned round and regarded her.

"Precisely so," he said. "You did promise; it was kind of you. And for myself, you may rely on my discretion. Your calling on me—what you repeated to me—all that is obliterated: you understand?"

Madame Potecki understood that very well; but she could not quite make out why he should have come to her this evening, apparently with no object beyond that of reminding her of her promise to say nothing of her visit to Lisle Street.

He lifted his hat from an adjacent chair.

"Now I will leave you to finish your dinner in quiet. You forgive me for interrupting you:

do you not? And you will remember, I am sure, not to mention to any one about your having called on me to-day? As for me, it is all wiped out: I know nothing. Adieu; and thanks!"

He shook hands with her in a very friendly manner; and then left, saying he could open the outer door for himself.

He got home in time for dinner; he and Natalie dined together. And he was particularly kind to her; he talked in Magyar, which was his custom when he wished to be friendly and affectionate; he made no reference to George Brand whatsoever.

"Natalie," said he, casually, "it was not fair that you were deprived of a holiday this year. You know the reason—there were too many important things going forward. But it is not yet too late. You must think about it—think where you would like to go for two or three weeks."

She did not answer. It was on that morning that she had placed her written offer in her lover's hands; so far there had been no reply from him.

"And Madame Potecki," her father continued. "She is not very rich; she has but little change. Why not take her with you instead of Anneli?"

"I should like to take her away for a time," said the girl, in a low voice. "She lives a monotonous life. But she has always her pupils."

"Some arrangement could be made with them, surely," her father said, lightly. And then he added, "Paris is always the safest place to go to, when one is in doubt. There you are independent of the weather. There are so many things to see and to do, if it rains. Will you think of it, Natalushka?"

"Yes, papa," she said, though she felt rather guilty. But she was so grateful to have her father talk to her in this friendly way again, after the days of estrangement that had passed, that she could not but pretend to fall in with his schemes.

"And I will tell you another thing," said Mr. Lind. "I intend to buy you some furs, Natalie, for the winter. These we will get in Paris."

"I am too much of an expense to you already, papa."

"You forget," said he, with mock gravity, "that you give me your invaluable services as housekeeper, and that so far you have received no salary."

There was a knock at the outer door.

"Is it nine o'clock already?" he said, in an altered tone.

"Whom do you expect, papa?"

"Gathorne Edwards."

"Then I will send you in coffee to the study."

But presently Anneli came into the room.

"Pardon, Fräulein, but the gentleman wishes to see you for one minute."

"Let him come in here, then."

Edwards came in, and shook hands with Natalie in an embarrassed manner. Then he produced a little packet.

"I have a commission, Miss Lind. It is from Signor Calabressa. He sends you this necklace, and says I am to tell you that he thinks of you always."

The message had been in reality that Calabressa "thought of her, and loved her, always." But Edwards was a shy person, and did not like to pronounce the word "love" to this beautiful girl, who regarded him with such proud, frank eyes.

"He has not returned with you, then?"

"No."

"But you can send him a message?"

"I will, when I hear of his address."

"Then you will tell him—will you be so kind?—that the little Natalushka—that is myself," she said, smiling—"you will tell him that the little Natalushka thanks him, and is not likely to forget him."

The interview between the new visitor and Mr. Lind was speedily got over. Lind excused himself for giving Edwards the trouble of this second appointment by saying he had been much engrossed with serious business during the day. There was, indeed, little new to be communicated about the Kirski and Calabressa escapade; though Edwards repeated the details as minutely as possible. He accepted a cigar, and left.

Then Lind got his overcoat and hat and went out of the house. A Hansom took him along to Lisle Street; he arrived there just as ten was striking.

There were two men at the door; they were Beratinsky and Reitzei. All three entered and went up the narrow stair in the dark, for the old German had gone. There was some fumbling for matches on the landing; then a light was

procured; and the gas lit in the central room. Mr. Lind sat down at his desk; the other two drew in chairs. The whole house was profoundly silent.

"I am sorry to take you away from your amusements," said he, civilly enough; "but you will soon be able to return to them. The matter is of importance. Edwards has returned."

Both men nodded; Reitzei had, in fact, informed his companion.

"As I anticipated, Calabressa's absurd proposal has been rejected—if not even scoffed at. Now, this affair must not be played with any longer. The Council has charged us, the English section, with a certain duty; we must set about having it performed at once."

"There is a year's grace——" Beratinsky observed; but Lind interrupted him curtly.

"There may be a year's grace or less allowed to the infamous priest; there is none allowed to us. We must have our agent ready. Why, man, do you think a thing like that can be done offhand, without long and elaborate planning?"

Beratinsky was silenced.

"Are we to have the Council think that we are

playing with them? And that was not the only thing in connection with the Calabressa scheme—which you, Reitzei, were the first to advocate. Every additional person whom you let into the secret is a possible weak point in the carrying out of the design: do you perceive that? And you had to let this man Edwards into it."

"But he is safe."

Lind laughed.

"Safe? Yes; because he knows his own life would not be worth a half-franc piece if he betrayed a Council secret. However, that is over. No more about it. We must show the Council that we can act, and promptly."

There was silence for a second or two.

"I have no need to wait for the further instructions of the Council," Lind resumed. "I know what they intend. They intend to make it clear to all Europe that this is not a Camorra act of vengeance. The Starving Cardinal has thousands of enemies; the people curse and groan at him; if he were stabbed by an Italian—'Oh, another of those Camorristi wretches!' would be the cry. The agent must come from England and, if he is taken red-handed, then let him say if

he likes that he is connected with an association which knows how to punish evil-doers who are beyond the ordinary reach of the law; but let him make it clear that it is no Camorra affair. You understand?"

"Yes, yes," said both men.

"Now you know what the Council have ordained," continued Lind, calmly, — "that no agent shall be appointed to undertake any service involving immediate peril to life without a ballot among at least four persons. It was absurd of Calabressa to imagine that they would abrogate their own decree, merely because that Russian madman was ready for anything. Well, it is not expedient that this secret should be confided to many. It is known to four persons in this country. We are three of the four."

The two men started.

"Yes," he said, boldly; and he regarded each of them in turn. "That is my proposal: that we ourselves form three of the ballot of four. The fourth must be an Englishman."

"Edwards?" said Beratinsky: Reitzei was thinking too much of his own position to speak.

"No," said Lind, calmly playing with his

pencil, "Edwards is a man of books—not of action. I have been thinking that the fourth ought to be—George Brand."

He watched them both. Reitzei was still preoccupied. But the small black eyes of Beratinsky twinkled eagerly.

"Yes, yes, yes! Very good! There we have our four. For myself, I am not afraid; not I!"

"And you, Reitzei; are you satisfied?" said Lind, merely as a matter of form.

The younger man started.

"Oh yes; the Council must be obeyed," said he, absently.

"Gentlemen," said Lind, rising, "the business is concluded. Now you may return to your Culturverein."

But when the others had risen, he said, in a laughing way—

"There is only one thing I will add; you may think about it at your leisure. The chances are three to one; and we all run the same risk. But I confess I should not be sorry to see the Englishman chosen; for, you perceive, that would make the matter clear enough. They would not accuse an Englishman of complicity with the

Camorra; would they, Reitzei? If the lot fell to the Englishman, I should not be disappointed: would you, Beratinsky?"

Beratinsky, who was about to leave, turned sharply, and the coal-black eyes were fixed intently on Lind's face.

"I?" he said. "Not I! We will talk again about it, Brother Lind."

Reitzei opened the door; Lind turned out the gas; and then the three men descended the wooden staircase, their footsteps sounding through the silent house.

CHAPTER XVII.

SANTA CLAUS.

To save time Brand jumped into a Hansom and drove down to Curzon Street. He was too much pre-occupied to remember that Natalie had wished him not to come to the house. Anneli admitted him, and showed him upstairs into the drawing-room. In a couple of seconds or so Natalie herself appeared.

"Well," said she, lightly, "you have come to tell me about Santa Claus? You have discovered the mysterious messenger?"

She shut the door, and went forward to him.

"What is the matter?" she said, quickly: there was something in his look that alarmed her.

He caught both her hands in his, and held them tight.

"Nothing to frighten you, at all events," said he. "No, Natalie—I have good news for you. Only—only—you must be brave.

It was he who was afraid. He did not know how to begin.

"That locket there," said he, regarding the little silver trinket. "Have you ever thought about it? Why do you wear it?"

"Why do I wear it?" she said, simply. "Because one day that Calabressa was talking to me it occurred to me that the locket might have belonged to my mother, and that some one had wished to give it to me. He did not say that was impossible. It was his talking of Natalie and Natalushka that put it in my head; perhaps it was a stupid fancy."

"Natalie, the locket did belong to your mother."

"Ah, you know, then?" she said, quickly; but with nothing beyond a bright and eager interest. "You have seen that lady? Well, what does she say? Was she angry that you followed her? Did you thank her for me for all those presents of flowers?"

"Natalie," said he, almost in despair, "have you never thought about it—about the locket? Have you never thought of what might be possible——?"

"I do not understand you," she said, with a bewildered air. "What is it? Why do you not speak?"

"Because I am afraid. See, I hold your hands tight because I am afraid. And yet it is good news—your heart will be filled with joy; your life will be quite different from to-day ever after. Natalie, cannot you imagine for yourself—something beautiful happening to you—something you may have dreamed of——"

She became a little pale; but she maintained her calmness.

"Dearest," said she, "why are you afraid to tell me. You hold my hands: do they tremble?"

"But, Natalie, think!" he said. "Think of the locket; it was given you by one who loved you—who has loved you all these years—and been kept away from you—and now she is waiting for you."

He studied her face intently: there was nothing there but a vague bewilderment. He grew more and more to fear the effect of the shock.

"Yes, yes. Can you not think, now, if it were possible that one whom you have always

thought to be dead—whom you have loved all through your life—if it were she herself——"

She withdrew her hands from his, and caught the back of a chair. She was ghastly pale. For a second she did not speak.

"You will kill me—if it is not true," she said, in a low voice, and still staring at him with frightened, bewildered eyes.

"Natalie, it is true," said he, stepping forward to catch her by the arm, for he thought she was going to fall.

She sank into the chair, and covered her face with her hands—not to cry, but to think. She had to reverse the belief of a lifetime, in a second.

But suddenly she started up, her face still white, her lips firm.

"Take me to her. I must see her. I will go at once."

"You shall not," he said, promptly—but he himself was beginning to breathe more freely. "I will not allow you to see her until you are perfectly calm."

He put his hand on her arm gently.

"Natalie," said he, "you must calm yourself—

for her sake. She has been suffering; she is weak; any wild scene would do her harm. You must calm yourself, my darling; you must be the braver of the two; you must show yourself very strong—for her sake."

"I am quite calm," she said, with the pale lips. She put her left hand over her heart. "It is only my heart that beats so."

"Well, in a little while——"

"Now—now!" she pleaded, almost wildly. "I must see her. When I try to think of it, it is like to drive me mad. I cannot think at all. Let us go!"

"You must think," he said, firmly; "you must think of what you are going to say. And your dress, too. Natalie, you must take that piece of scarlet ribbon away: one who is nearly related to you has just died."

She tore it off instantly.

"And you know Magyar, don't you, Natalie?"

"Oh yes, yes."

"Because your mother has been learning English in order to be able to speak to you."

Again she placed her hand over her heart; and there was a look of pain on her face.

"My dearest, let us go! I can bear no more: my heart will break. See, am I not calm enough? Do I tremble?"

"No, you are very courageous,' he said, looking at her doubtfully.

"Let us go!—let us go!"

Her entreaties overcame his scruples. The things she had thrown aside on coming in from her morning walk still lay there; she hastily put them on; and she herself led the way downstairs. He put her into the Hansom, and followed; the man drove off. She held her lover's hand tight; as a sign of her gratitude.

"Mind, I depend on you, Natalie," he said.

"Oh, do not fear," she said—rather wildly. "Why should one fear? It seems to me all a strange sort of dream; and I shall waken out of it by-and-by, and go back to the house. Why should I be surprised to see her, when she is my constant companion? And do you think I shall not know what to say?—I have talked to her all my life!"

But when they had reached the house and were admitted, this half-hysterical courage had fled.

"One moment, dearest; give me one moment," she said at the foot of the stairs, as if her breath failed her, and she put her hand on his arm.

"Now, Natalie," he whispered, "you must think of your mother as an invalid—not to be excited, you understand. There is to be no scene."

"Yes, yes," she said, but she scarcely heard him.

"Now, go," he said, "and I will wait here."

"No, I wish you to come," she said.

"You ought to be alone with her."

"I wish you to come," she repeated; and she took his hand.

They went upstairs; the door was wide open; a figure stood in the middle of the room. Natalie entered first; she was very white; that was all. It was the other woman who was trembling—trembling with anxious fears, and forgetful of every one of the English phrases she had learned.

The girl at the door hesitated but for a a moment. Breathless, wondering, she beheld this vision—worn as the face was, she recognized in it the features she had learned to love

and there were the dark and tender eyes she had so often held commune with, when she was alone. It was only because she was so startled that she thus hesitated; the next instant she was in her mother's arms, held tight there, her head against her bosom.

Then the mother began, in her despair—

"My—my daughter—you—do—know me?"

But the girl, not looking up, murmured some few words in a language Brand did not understand; and at the sound of them, the mother uttered a wild cry of joy, and drew her daughter closer to her, and laid her streaming, worn, sad face on the beautiful hair. They spoke together in that tongue; the sounds were soft and tender to the ear; perhaps it was the yearning of love that made them so.

Then Natalie remembered her promise. She gently released herself; she led her mother to a sofa, and made her sit down; she threw herself on her knees beside her, and kissed her hand; then she buried her head in her mother's lap. She sobbed once or twice; she was determined not to give way to tears. And the mother stroked the soft hair of the girl, which she

could hardly see, for her eyes were full; and from time to time she spoke to her, in those gentle, trembling tones, bending over her and speaking close to her ear. The girl was silent; perhaps afraid to awake from a dream.

"Natalie," said George Brand.

She sprang to her feet.

"Oh, I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon!" she said, hurriedly. "I had forgotten——"

"No, you have not forgotten," he said, with an approving smile. "You have remembered. You have behaved well. Now that I have seen you through it, I am going. You ought to be by yourselves."

"Oh no!" she said, in a bewildered way. "Without you I am useless: I cannot think. I should go on talking and talking to my mother, all day, all night—because—because my heart is full. But—but one must do something. Why is she here? She will come home with me—now?"

"Natalie," said he, gravely, "you must not even mention such a thing to her: it would pain her. Can you not see that there are sufficient reasons why she should not go, when she

has not been under your father's roof for sixteen years?"

"And why has my father never told me?" the girl said, breathlessly.

"I cannot say."

She thought for a moment; but she was too excited to follow out any train of thinking.

"Ah," she said, "what matter? I have found a great treasure. And you, you shall not go: it will be we three together now. Come!"

She took his hand; she turned to her mother; her face flushed with shyness. She said something, her eyes turned to the ground, in that soft, musical language he did not understand.

"I know, my child," the mother answered, in French, and she laughed lightly despite her wet eyes. "Do you think one cannot see? And I have been following you like a spy!"

"Ah, then," said the girl, in the same tongue, "do you see what lies they tell. They say when the mother comes near her child, the heart of the child knows and recognizes her. It is not true; it is not true!—or perhaps one has a colder heart than the others. You have been near to me, mother; I have watched you, as you went away

crying; and all I said was, 'Ah, the poor lady, I am sorry for her.' I had no more pity for you than Anneli had. Anneli used to say, 'Perhaps, Fräulein, she has lost some one who resembled you.'"

"I had lost you—I had lost you," the mother said, drawing the girl towards her again. "But now I have found you again, Natalushka. I thank God for His goodness to me. I said to myself, 'If my child turns away from me, I will die.' And I thought that if you had any portrait of me, it would be taken when I was young; and you would not care for an old woman grown haggard and plain——"

"Oh, do you think it is for smooth portraits that I care!" the girl said, impetuously. She drew out from some concealed pocket a small case; and opened it. "Do you think it is for smooth faces one cares? There—I will never look at it again!"

She threw it on to the table, with a proud gesture.

"But you had it next your heart, Natalushka," said her mother, smiling.

"But I have you in my heart, mother: what do I want with a portrait?" said the girl.

She drew her daughter down to her again, and put her arm once more round her neck.

"I once had hair like yours, Natalushka, but not so beautiful as yours, I think. And you wear the locket, too? Did not that make you guess? Had you no suspicion?"

"How could I—how could I?" she asked. "Even when I showed it to Calabressa——"

Here she stopped suddenly.

"Did he know, mother?"

"Oh yes."

"Then why did he not tell me? Oh, it was cruel!" she said, indignantly.

"He told me, Natalie," George Brand said.

"You knew?" the girl said, turning to him with wide eyes.

"Yes; and Calabressa, when he told me, implored me never to tell you. Well, perhaps he thought it would give you needless pain. But I was thinking, within the last few days, that I ought to tell you before I left for America."

"Do you hear, mother?" the girl said, in a low voice. "He is going away to America—and alone. I wished to go; he refuses."

"Now I am going away much more con-

tented, Natalie, since you will have a constant companion with you. I presume, madame, you will remain in England?"

The elder woman looked up with rather a frightened air.

"Alas, monsieur, I do not know. When at last I found myself free—when I knew I could come and speak to my child—that was all I thought of."

"But you wish to remain in England: is it not so?"

"What have I in the world now but this beautiful child, this child whose heart is not cold, though her mother comes so late to claim her?"

"Then be satisfied, madame. It is simple. No one can interfere with you. But I will provide you, if you will allow me, with better lodgings than these. I have a few days' idleness still before me."

"That is his way, mother," Natalie said, in a still lower voice. "It is always about others he is thinking—how to do one a kindness."

"I presume," he said, in quite a matter-of-fact way, "that you do not wish your being in London to become known?"

She looked up timidly—but in truth she could hardly take her attention away from this newly found daughter of hers for a single second. She still continued stroking the soft hair and rounded cheek as she said——

"If that is possible."

"It would not be long possible, in an open thoroughfare like this," he said. "But I think I could find you a small old-fashioned house down about Brompton—with a garden and a high wall. I have passed such places occasionally. There Natalie could come to see you, and walk with you. There is another thing," he said in a matter-of-fact way, taking out his watch. "It is now nearly two o'clock. Now, dear madame, Natalie is in the habit of having luncheon at one. You would not like to see your child starve before your eyes?"

The elder woman rose instantly. Then she coloured somewhat.

"No doubt you did not expect visitors," George Brand said, quickly. "Well, what do you say to this? Let us get into a four-wheeled cab, and drive down to my chambers. I have an indefatigable fellow, who could get something for us in the desert of Sahara."

"What do you say, child?"

Natalie had risen too: she was regarding her mother with earnest eyes, and not thinking much about luncheon.

"I will do whatever you wish," she was saying; but suddenly she cried, "Oh, I am indeed so happy!" and flung her arms round her mother's neck, and burst into a flood of tears—for the first time. She had struggled long; but she had broken down at last.

"Natalie," said George Brand, pretending to be very anxious about the time, "could you get your mother's things for her? I think we shall be down there by a quarter past two."

She turned to him, with her streaming eyes.

"Yes, we will go with you. Do not let us be separated."

"Then look sharp," said he, severely.

Natalie took her mother into the adjoining room. Brand, standing at the window, succeeded in catching the eye of a cabman, whom he signalled to come to the door below. Presently the two women appeared.

"Now," he said, "Miss Natalie, there is to be no more crying."

"Oh no!" she said, smiling quite radiantly. "And I am so anxious to see the rooms—I have heard so much of them from Lord Evelyn."

She said nothing further then, for she was passing before him on her way out. In doing so, she managed unseen to pick up the miniature she had thrown on the table. She had made believe to despise that portrait very much; but all the same, as they went down the dark staircase, she conveyed it back to the secret little pocket she had made for it—next her heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SUMMONS.

"MOTHER," said the girl, in the soft-sounding Magyar, as these two were together going downstairs, "give me your hand. Let me hold it tight—to make sure. All the way here I kept terrifying myself by thinking it must be a dream; that I should wake, and find the world empty without you, just as before. But now—now with your hand in mine, I am sure."

"Natalushka, you can hear me speak also. Ghosts do not speak like this, do they?"

Brand had preceded them, to open the door. As Natalie was passing him she paused for a second, and regarded him with the beautiful, tender, dark eyes.

"I am not likely to forget what I owe to you," she said in English.

He followed them into the cab.

"What you owe to me?" he said, lightly.

"You owe me nothing at all. But if you wish to do me a good turn, you may pretend to be pleased with whatever old Waters can get together for you. The poor old fellow will be in a dreadful state. To entertain two ladies, and not a moment of warning! However, we will show you the river, and the boats and things; and give him a few minutes' grace."

Indeed, it was entirely as a sort of harmless frolic that he chose to regard this present excursion of theirs. He was afraid of the effect of excessive emotion on this worn woman; and he was anxious that she should see her daughter cheerful and happy. He would not have them think of any future; above all he would have nothing said about himself or America; it was all an affair of the moment—the joyous reunion of mother and daughter—a pleasant morning with London all busy and astir—the only serious thing in the whole world the possible anxieties and struggles of the venerable major-domo in Buckingham Street.

He had not much difficulty in entertaining these two guests of his on their way down. They professed to be greatly interested in the history and antiquities of the old-fashioned little

thoroughfare over the river; arrived there, they regarded with much apparent curiosity the houses pointed out to them as having been the abode of illustrious personages; they examined the old water-gate; and in ascending the oak staircase, they heard of painted ceilings and what not with a deep and respectful attention. But always these two had each other's hand clasped tight; and occasionally Natalie murmured a little snatch of Magyar. It was only to make sure, she explained.

Before they reached the topmost storey they heard a considerable noise overhead. It was a one-sided altercation; broken and piteous on the one hand, voluble and angry on the other.

"It sounds as if Waters were having a row with the man in possession," Brand said.

They drew nearer.

"Why, Natalie, it is your friend Kirski!"

Brand was following his two guests upstairs; and so could not interfere between the two combatants before they arrived. But the moment that Natalie appeared on the landing, there was a dead silence. Kirski shrank back with a slight exclamation; and stood looking from one to the

other with a frightened air. She advanced to him and asked him what was the matter, in his native tongue. He shrank farther back. The man could not or would not speak. He murmured something to himself; and stared at her as if she were a spectre.

"He has got a letter for you, sir," Waters said; "I have seen the address; and he will neither leave it nor take it. And as for what he has been trying to say, Lord A'mighty knows what it is. I don't."

"Very well—all right," Brand said. "You leave him to us. Cut away and get us some luncheon—whatever you can find—at once."

But Natalie had gone nearer to the Russian, and was talking to him, in that fearless, gentle way of hers. By-and-by he spoke—in an uncertain, almost gasping voice. Then he showed her a letter; and, in obedience to something she said, went timidly forward, and placed it in Brand's hand.

"*À Monsieur,*
M. George Brand, Esq.,
Londres."

—this was the superscription; and Brand recognized the handwriting easily enough.

"The letter is from Calabressa," he said, "obviously. Tell him not to be alarmed. We shall not eat him, however hungry we may be."

Kirski had recovered himself somewhat, and was speaking eagerly to her, in a timid, anxious, imploring fashion. She listened in silence; but she was clearly somewhat embarrassed; and when she turned to her lover, there was some flush of colour on her face.

"He talks some wild things," she said, "and some foolish things; but he means no harm. I am sorry for the poor man. He is afraid you are angry with him; he says he promised never to try to see me; that he would not have come if he had known. I have told him you are not angry; that it is not his fault; that you will show you are not angry."

But first of all Brand ushered his guests into the long low-roofed chamber; and drew the portieres across the middle, so that Waters might have an apartment for his luncheon preparations. Then he opened the letter. Kirski remained at the door, with his cap in his hand.

"My much esteemed friend," Calabressa wrote, in his ornate, ungrammatical, and phonetic

French, "the poor devil who is the bearer of this letter is known to you, and yet not altogether known to you. You know something of his conversion from a wild beast into a man; from the tiger into a devotee; but you do not, my friend, perhaps entirely know how his life has become absorbed in one worship, one aspiration, one desire. The means of the conversion, the instrument, you know; have I not myself before described it to you? The harassed and bleeding heart, crushed with scorn and filled with despair—how can a man live with that in his bosom? He wishes to die. The world has been too cruel to him. But all at once an angel appears; into the ruins of the wasted life a seed of kindness is dropped; and then behold! the beautiful flower of love springing up—love that becomes a worship, a religion! Yes, I have said so much before to you; now I say more; now I entreat you not to check this beautiful worship—it is sacred. This man goes round the churches; he stands before the pictures of the saints; he wanders on unsatisfied; he says there is no saint like the beautiful one in England, who healed him with her soft words when he was sick to death. But

now, my dear Monsieur Brand, I hear you say to yourself, 'What is my friend Calabressa after now? Has he taken to the writing of pious sermons? Is he about to shave his head and put a rope round his waist? My faith, that is not like that fellow Calabressa!' You are right, my friend. I describe the creation of the devotee; it is a piece of poetry, as one might say. But your devotee must have his amulet; is it not so? This is the meaning and prayer of my letter to you. The bearer of it was willing to do us a great service; perhaps—if one must confess it—he believed it was on behalf of the beautiful Natalushka and her father that he was to undertake the duty that now devolves on some other. One must practise a little *finesse* sometimes; what harm is there? Very well; do you know what he seeks by way of reward—what he considers the most valuable thing in the world? It is a portrait of his saint, you understand? That is the amulet the devotee would have. And I do not further wish to write to her; no, because she would say, 'What, that is a little matter to do for my friend Calabressa.' No; I write to you; I write to one who has knowledge of affairs; and

I say to myself, 'If he considers it prudent, then he will ask the beautiful child to give her portrait to this one who will worship it.' I have declared to him that I will make the request; I make it. Do not consider it a trifling matter; it is not to him; it is the crown of his existence. And if he says, 'Do you see, this is what I am ready to do for her—I will give my life if she or her friends wish it;' then I say, I, Calabressa, that a portrait, at one shilling, two shillings, ten shillings, is not so very much in return. Now, my dear friend, you will consider the prudence of granting his request and mine. I believe in his faithfulness. If you say to him, 'The beautiful lady who was kind to you wishes you to do this, or do that; or wishes you never to part with this portrait; or wishes you to keep silence on this or on that,' you may depend on him. I say so. Adieu! Say to the little one that there is some one who does not forget her. Perhaps you will never hear from Calabressa again; remember him not as a madcap, but as one who wished you well. To-morrow I start for Cyprus; then farther—with a light heart. Adieu!

"CALABRESSA."

He handed the letter to Natalie's mother. The elder woman read the letter carefully. She laughed quietly; but there were tears in her eyes.

"It is like my old friend Calabressa," she said. "Natalushka, they want you to give your portrait to this poor creature who adores you. Why not? Calabressa says he will do whatever you tell him. Tell him, then, not to part with it; not to show it to any one; and not to say to any one he has seen either you or me here. Is not that simple? Tell him to come here to-morrow or next day; you can send the photograph to Mr. Brand."

The girl went to the door; and said a few words to Kirski. He said nothing in reply; but sank on his knees, as he had done in Curzon Street, and took her hand and kissed it; then he rose, and bowed respectively to the others, and left.

Presently Waters came in and announced that luncheon was on the table; the portieres were drawn aside; they passed into the further end of the apartment; and sat down. The banquet was not a sumptuous one; and there were no flowers on the table; but it was everything that

any human being could have done in fifteen minutes; and these were bachelors' rooms. Natalie took care to make a pretty speech in the hearing of Mr. Waters.

"Yes, but you eat nothing," the host said, in English. "Do you think your mother will have anything if she sees you indifferent?"

Presently the mother, who seemed to be much amused with something or other, said in French—

"Ah, my friend, I did not think my child would be so deceitful. I did not think she would deceive you."

The girl stared with wide eyes.

"She pretended to tell you what this poor man said to her," said the mother, with a quiet smile. "She forgot that some one else than herself might know Russian."

Natalie flushed red.

"Mother!" she remonstrated. "I said he had spoken a lot of foolish things."

"After all," said the mother, "he said no more than what Calabressa says, in the letter. You have been kind to him; he regards you as an angel; he will give you his life; you, or any one

whom you love. The poor man! Did you see how he trembled?"

Natalie turned to George Brand.

"He said something more than that," said she. "He said he had undertaken some duty, some service, that was expected to have cost him his life. He did not know what it was: do you?"

"I do not," said he, answering frankly the honest look of her eyes. "I can scarcely believe any one was foolish enough to think of entrusting any serious duty to a man like that. But still Calabressa hints as much; and I know he left England with Calabressa."

"Natalushka," the mother said, cautiously, and yet with an anxious scrutiny, "I have often wondered—whether you knew much—much about the Society?"

"Oh no, mother! I am allowed to translate; and sometimes I hear that help is to be given here or there; but I am in no secrets at all. That is my misfortune."

The mother seemed much relieved.

"It is no misfortune, child. You are happier as you are, I think. Then," she added, with a

quick glance, "you have never heard of one—Bartolotti?"

"No," she answered; but directly afterwards she exclaimed—"Oh yes, yes! Bartolotti—that is the name Calabressa gave me. He said if ever I was in very serious trouble, I was to go to Naples; and that was the pass-word. But I thought to myself, 'If I am in trouble, why should I not go to my own father?'"

The mother rose and went to the girl, and put her arm round her daughter's neck, and stooped down.

"Natalushka," said she, earnestly, "you are wiser than Calabressa. If you are in trouble, do not seek any help that way. Go to your father."

"And to you, mother," said she, drawing down the worn, beautiful face and kissing it. "Why not to you also? Why not to you both?"

The mother smiled, and patted the girl's head, and then returned to the other side of the table. Waters brought in some fruit—fresh from Covent Garden.

He also brought in a letter, which he put beside his master's plate. Brand did not even look at it; he pushed it aside, to give him more

room. But in pushing it aside, he turned it somewhat; and Natalie's eye happening to fall on the address, she perceived at once that it was in the handwriting of her father.

"Dearest," said she, in a low voice, and rather breathlessly, "the letter is from papa."

"From your father?" said he, without any great concern. Then he turned to Natalie's mother. "Will you excuse me? My friends are determined to remind me of their existence to-day."

But this letter was much shorter than Calabressa's; though it was friendly enough.

"My dear Mr. Brand," it ran, "I am glad to hear that you have acted with so much promptitude that your preparations for departure are nearly complete. You are soldier-like. I have less scruple, therefore, in asking you to be so kind as to give me up to-morrow evening, from half-past nine onwards, for the consideration of a very serious order that has been transmitted to us from the Council. You will perceive that this claims precedence over any of our local arrangements; and as it may even involve the abandonment of your voyage to America, it will be advisable to

give it immediate consideration. I trust the hour of half-past nine will not interfere with any engagement.

"Your colleague and friend,

FERDINAND LIND."

This was all that an ordinary reader would have seen in the letter; but Brand observed also, down at the left-hand corner, a small mark in green colour. That tiny arrow, with the two dots—the whole almost invisible—changed the letter from an invitation into a command. It signified "On business of the Council."

He laid down the letter, and said lightly to Natalie—

"Now I have some news for you. I may not have to go to America after all."

"You are not going to America?" she said in a bewildered way. "Oh, if it were possible—if it were possible!" she murmured. "I would say I was too happy—God is too good to me—to have them both given back to me in one day—both of them—in one day——"

"Natalie," said he, gently, "it is only a possibility, you know."

"But it *is* possible!" she said; and there was a quick, strange, happy light in her face. "It *is* possible, is it not?"

Then she glanced at her mother; and her face, that had been somewhat pale, was pale no longer; the blood mounted to her forehead; her eyes were downcast.

"It would please you, would it not?" she said to him, somewhat formally, and in a low and timid voice. The mother, unobserved, smiled.

"Oh yes," he said, cheerfully. "But even if I go to America, what then? In a couple of years—it is not a long time—I should expect your mother and you to be arriving at Sandy Hook; and I should have a small steamer there to meet you; and we could sail up the Bay together."

Luncheon over, they went to the window, and greatly admired the view of the gardens below and the wide river beyond; and they went round the room, examining the water-colours, and bits of embroidery, and nick-nacks brought from many lands; and they were much interested in one or two portraits. Altogether they were charmed with the place, though the elder lady

said, in her pretty, careful French, that it was clear no woman's hand was about, otherwise there would have been white curtains at the windows besides those heavy straight folds of red. Brand said he preferred to have plenty of light in the room; and in fact at this moment the sunlight was painting squares of beautiful colour on the faded old Turkey carpet. All this time Natalie had shown much reserve.

When the mother and daughter were in the cab together going to Edgware Road—George Brand was off by himself to Brompton—the mother said—

"Natalushka, why was your manner so much changed to Mr. Brand after you heard he might not be going to America?"

The girl hesitated for a moment; and her eyes were lowered.

"You see, mother," she said, with some embarrassment, "when one is in great trouble and difficulty—and when you wish to show sympathy—then perhaps you speak too plainly. You do not think of choosing very prudent words; your heart speaks for you; and one may say things that a girl should not be too ready to confess.

That is when there is great trouble; and you are grieved for some one. But—but—when the trouble goes away—when it is all likely to come right—one remembers——"

The explanation was rather stammering and confused.

"But at least, mother," she added, with her eyes still downcast, "at least I can be frank with you. There is no harm in my telling you that I love you."

The mother pressed the hand that she held in hers.

"And if you tell me often enough, Natalushka, perhaps I shall begin to believe you."

CHAPTER XIX.

A NEW HOME.

GEORGE BRAND set out house-hunting with two exceptional circumstances in his favour; he knew precisely what he wanted, and he was prepared to pay for it. Moreover, he undertook the task willingly and cheerfully. It was something to do. It would fill in a portion of that period of suspense. It would prevent his harassing himself with speculations as to his own future—speculations which were obviously useless until he should learn what was required of him by the Council.

But none the less was he doomed to the house-hunter's inevitable disappointment. He found, in the course of his devious wanderings through all sorts of out-of-the-way thoroughfares within a certain radius from Brompton Church, that the houses which came nearest to his ideal

cottage in a walled garden were either too far away from Hyde Park, or they were not to be let, or they were to be let unfurnished. So, like a prudent person, he moderated his desires, and began to cast about for any furnished house of fairly cheerful aspect, with a garden behind. But here again he found that the large furnished houses were out of the question, because they were unnecessarily expensive, and that the smaller ones were mostly to be found in slummy streets; while in both cases there was a difficulty about servants. The end of it was that he took the first floor of an old-fashioned house in Hans Place, being induced to do so partly because the landlady was a bright, pleasant-looking little Frenchwoman, and partly because the rooms were furnished and decorated in a fashion not common to lodging-houses.

Then came the question of terms, references, and what not; and on all of these points Mr. Brand showed himself remarkably complaisant. But when all this was done, he sat down, and said—

"Now I wish you to understand me clearly, madame. This lady I have told you about has

come through much trouble; you are to be kind to her; and I will see you do not lose by it. Her daughter will come to see her frequently—perhaps every day; I suppose the young lady's maid can remain downstairs somewhere."

"Oh yes, sir."

"Very well. Now if you will be so good as to get me pen and ink, I will give you a cheque for fifty-two pounds—that is a pound a week for a year. You see, there are a number of little kindnesses you could show this poor lady that would be all the more appreciated if they were not put down in a book and charged for: you understand? You could find out, perhaps, from time to time some little delicacy she is fond of. Then flowers: there is a good florist's shop in Sloane Street, is there not?"

"Oh yes, sir."

She brought the ink; and he drew out the cheque.

"Then when the young lady comes to see her mother, you will be very attentive and kind to her too. You must not wait for them to ask for this or that; you must come up to the door and say, 'Will not the young lady have a cup of choco-

late'—or whatever you can suggest—fruit, biscuits, wine, or what not. And as these little extra things will cost you something, I cannot allow you to be out of pocket; so here is a fund for you to draw from; and of course not a word to either of the ladies. I think you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir," said madame.

"Then if I hear that you have been very kind and obliging, I suppose one might be allowed from time to time to send you a little present—something to beautify your house with? You have pretty rooms. You have shown great taste in decorating them."

"Oh, not I, sir," said the little Frenchwoman, "I took the house as it stands from Mr. ——."

"The architect?" said Brand. "Ah, that explains. But I am surprised he should have used gas."

"That *was* my doing," said the landlady, with some pride. "It is a great improvement. It is so convenient, is it not?"

"My dear madame," said Brand, seriously, "it cannot be convenient to have one's lungs poisoned with the smoke of London gas. You must on no account allow this lady who is coming to

your house to sit through the long evenings with gas blazing over her head all the time; why, she would have continual headache. No, no, you must get a couple of lamps—one for the piano there, and a smaller reading-one for this little table by the fire. Then these sconces, you will get candles for them, of course; red ones look pretty—not pink, but red."

The French landlady seemed rather dismayed. She had been all smiles and courtesy so far; but now the bargain did not promise to be so profitable if this was the way she was to begin. But Brand pulled out his watch.

"If you will allow me," said he, "I will go and get a few things to make the room look homely. You see this lady must be made as comfortable as possible, for she will see no one but her daughter, and all the evenings she will be alone. Now will you be so good as to have the fire lit? And these little things that I am about to get for you, of course they will become your property; only you need not say who presented them to you, you perceive?"

The little woman's face grew happy again; and she assured him fervently and repeatedly that

he might trust to her to do her best for this lady about whom he seemed so anxious.

It was almost dusk when he went out; most of the shops in Sloane Street had their windows lit. He set about this further task of his with an eager delight. For although it was ostensibly for Natalie's mother that he was buying this and buying that, there was an underlying consciousness that Natalie herself would be pleased, that many and many a time she would occupy that pretty little sitting-room, that perhaps she might guess who it was who had been so thoughtful about her mother and herself. Fortunately Sloane Street is an excellent shopping thoroughfare; he got everything he wanted—even wax candles of the proper tint of red. He first of all went to the florist's and got fruit and flowers enough to decorate a hall. Then from shop to shop he wandered, buying books here, a couple of lamps there, a low, softly cushioned easy-chair, a fire-screen, pastilles, tins of sweet biscuits, a dozen or two of Hungarian wine, a tea-making apparatus, a box of various games, some white-rose scent, and he was very nearly adding a sewing-machine, but thought he would wait to

see whether she understood the use of that instrument. All these and many other articles were purchased on the explicit condition that they were to be delivered in Hans Place within the following half-hour.

Then he went back to the lodging-house, carrying in his hand the red candles. These he placed himself in the sconces, and lit them; the effect was good, now that the fire was blazing cheerfully. One by one the things arrived; and gradually the lodging-house sitting-room grew more and more like a home. He put the flowers here and there about the place, the little French woman having brought him such small jars and vases as were in her possession—these fortunately including a couple of bits of modern Venetian glass. The reading-lamp was lit and put on the small table. The newly imported easy-chair was drawn to the fire; some books and the evening papers scattered about. He lit one of the pastilles; put the fire-screen in its place; and had a last look round.

Then he got into a Hansom and drove up to the house in the Edgware Road. He was immediately admitted and shown upstairs. Natalie's

mother rose to receive him; he fancied she had been crying.

"I am come to take you to your new rooms," he said, cheerfully. "They are a little better than these."

"Ah, that is kind of you," she said, also speaking in French; "but in truth what do I care where I am? My heart is full of joy. It is enough for me to sit quiet and say to myself, 'My child loves me. She has not turned away from me. She is more beautiful even than I had believed; and she has a good heart. I have no longer any fear.'"

"Yes, madame," said he, "but you must not sit quiet and think like that, or you will become ill, and then how are you to go out walking with Natalie? You have many things to do; and many things to decide on. For example, you will have to explain to her how it is you may not go to her father's house. At this moment what other thing than that do you imagine she is thinking about? She will ask you."

"I would rather not tell her," said the mother, absently. "It is better she should not know."

He hesitated for a second or two.

"Then it is impossible that a reconciliation between your husband and yourself——"

"Oh no, no," she said, somewhat sadly. "That is impossible, now."

"And you are anxious he should not know that you and your daughter see each other."

"I am not so anxious," she said. "I have faith in Natalushka: I can perceive her courage. But perhaps it would be better."

"Very well. Then come to these other rooms I have got for you; they are in a more secluded neighbourhood."

"Very well, monsieur. I have but few things with me. I will be ready soon."

In less than half an hour after that, the French landlady was receiving her new guest; and so eager was she to show to the English gentleman her gratitude for his substantial presents, that her officious kindness was almost burdensome.

"I thank you," said the new-comer, with a smile, as the landlady brought her a cushion for her back the moment she sat down in the easy-chair, "but I am not yet an invalid."

Then would Madame have some tea? Or perhaps Madame had not dined? There was

little in the house; but something could be prepared at once; from to-morrow morning Madame's instructions would be fulfilled to the letter. To get rid of her, Brand informed her that Madame had not dined; and would be glad to have anything that happened to be in the house. Then she left; and he was about to leave also.

"No," said the beautiful mother to him, with a smile on the pale face. "Sit down. I have something to say to you."

He sat down; his hat still in his hand.

"I have not thanked you," she said. "I see who has done all this: do you think a stranger would know to have the white-rose scent for me, that Natalie uses? She was right: you are kind—you think of others."

"It is nothing—it is nothing," he said, hastily, and with all an Englishman's embarrassment.

"My dear friend," said his companion, with a grave kindness in her tone, and a look of affectionate interest in her eyes, "I am going to prove my gratitude to you. I am going to prevent—what do you call it?—a lovers' quarrel."

He started.

"Yesterday," she continued, still regarding

him in that kindly way, "before we left your rooms, Natalushka was very reserved towards you; was it not so? I perceived it. And you?"

"I—I thought she was tired," he stammered.

"To-morrow you are to fetch her here. And what if you find her still more reserved—even cold towards you? You will be pained—perhaps alarmed. Ah, my dear friend, life is made very bitter sometimes by mistakes; so it is that I must tell you the reason. The child loves you; be sure of that. Yes; but she thinks that she has been too frank in saying so—in time of trouble and anxiety; and now—now that you are perhaps not going to America—now that perhaps all the trouble is over—now she is beginning to think she ought to be a little more discreet, as other young ladies are. The child means no harm; but you and she must not quarrel."

He took her hand, to bid her good-bye.

"Natalie and I are not likely to quarrel," said he, cheerfully. "Now I am going away. If I stayed, you would do nothing but talk about her; whereas it is necessary that you should have some dinner, then read one of these books for an hour or so, then go to bed and have a long, sound

night's rest. You must be looking your brightest when she comes to see you to-morrow."

And indeed, as it turned out subsequently, this warning of the mother's was not wholly unnecessary. Next day at eleven o'clock, as had previously been arranged, Brand met Natalie at the corner of Great Stanhope Street to escort her to the house to which her mother had removed. He had not even got into the Park with her when he perceived that her manner was distinctly reserved. Anneli was with her; and she kept talking from time to time to the little maid, who was thus obliged, greatly against her will, to walk close to her mistress. At last Brand said—

"Natalie, have I offended you?"

"Oh no!" she said, in a hurried, low voice.

"Natalie," said he, very gently, "I once heard of a wicked creature who was determined to play the hypocrite, and might have done a great deal of mischief, only she had a most amiable mother, who stepped in and gave somebody else a warning. Did you ever hear of such a wicked person?"

The blood mounted to her face. By this time Anneli had taken leave to fall behind.

"Then," said the girl, with some hesitation, and yet with firmness, "you will not misunderstand me. If all the circumstances are to be altered—then—then you must forget what I have said to you in moments of trouble. I have a right to ask it. You must forget the past altogether."

"But it is impossible!"

"It is necessary."

For some minutes they walked on in silence. Then he felt a timid touch on his arm; her hand had been laid there, deprecatingly, for a moment.

"Are you angry with me?"

"No, I am not," said he, frankly, "for the very reason that what you ask is impossible, unnecessary, absurd. You might as well ask me to forget that I am alive. In any case, isn't it rather too soon? Are you so sure that all the trouble is past. Wait till the storm is well over, and we are going into port; then we will put on our Sunday manners to go ashore."

"I am afraid you are angry with me," she said again, timidly.

"You could not make me, if you tried," he said, simply. "But I am proud of you, Natalie—proud of the courage and clearness and frank-

ness of your character; and I don't like to see you fall away from that, and begin to consider what a schoolmistress would think of you."

"It is not what any one may think of me that I consider; it is what I think of myself," she answered, in the same low voice.

They reached Hans Place. The mother was at the door of the room to welcome them. She took her daughter by the hand, and led her in.

"Look round, Natalushka," she said. "Can you guess who has arranged all this for me—for me and for you?"

The girl almost instantly turned—her eyes cast down—and took her lover's hand, and kissed it, in silence. That was all.

Then said he, lightly, as he shoved the low easy-chair nearer the fire—

"Come, madame, and sit down here. And you, Natalushka, here is a stool for you, that you will be able to lean your head on your mother's knee. There; it is a very pretty group: do you know why I make you into a picture? Well, you see, these are troubled times; and one has one's work to do; and who can tell what may

happen? But don't you see that whatever may happen, I can carry away with me this picture; and always, wherever I may be, I can say to myself that Natalie and her mother are together in the quiet little room, and that they are happy. Now I must bid you good-bye; I have a great deal of business to-day with my solicitor. And the landlady, madame: how does she serve you?"

"She overwhelms me with kindness."

"That is excellent," said he, as he shook hands with them and—against both their protests—took his leave.

He carried away that picture in his mind. He had left these two together; and they were happy. What mattered it to him what became of himself?

It was on the evening of that day that he had to obey the summons of the Council.

CHAPTER XX.

A CONCLAVE.

PUNCTUAL to the moment George Brand arrived in Lisle Street. He was shown into an inner room, where he found Lind seated at a desk, and Reitzei and Beratinsky standing by the fireplace. On an adjacent table were four cups of black coffee, four small glasses, a bottle of brandy, and a box of cigarettes.

Lind rose to receive him, and was very courteous indeed—apologizing for having had to break in on his preparations for leaving, and offering him coffee, cigarettes, and what not. When the new-comer had declined these, Lind resumed his place and begged the others to be seated.

"We will proceed to business at once, gentlemen," said he, speaking in quite an ordinary and matter-of-fact way, "although, I will confess to

you, it is not business entirely to my liking. Perhaps I should not say so. This paper, you see, contains my authorization from the Council to summon you and to explain the service they demand: perhaps I should merely obey, and say nothing. But we are friends; we can speak in confidence."

Here Reitzei, who was even more pallid than usual, and whose fingers seemed somewhat shaky, filled one of the small glasses of brandy, and drank it off.

"I do not say that I hesitate," continued Lind—"that I am reluctant—because the service that is required from us—from one of us four—is dangerous—is exceedingly dangerous. No," he said, with a brief smile, "as far as I am myself concerned, I have carried my life in my hands too often to think much about that. And you, gentlemen, considering the obligations you have accepted, I take it that the question of possible harm to yourselves is not likely to interfere with your obedience to the commands of the Council."

"As for me," said Reitzei, eagerly and nervously, "I tell you this, I should like to have something exciting now—I do not care what. I

am tired of this work in London—it is slow, regular, like the ticking of a clock. I am for something to stir the blood a little. I say that I am ready for anything."

"As for me," said Beratinsky, curtly, "no one has ever yet called me a coward."

Brand said nothing; but he perceived that this was something unusually serious; and almost unconsciously he closed his right hand, that he might feel the clasp of Natalie's ring. There was no need to appeal to his oaths of allegiance.

Lind proceeded, in a graver fashion—

"Yes, I confess that personally I am for avoiding violence, for proceeding according to law. But then the Council would say perhaps, 'Are there not injuries for which the law gives no redress? Are there not those who are beyond the power of the law? And we, who have given our lives to the redressing of wrongs, to the protection of the poor, to the establishment of the right, are we to stand by and see the moral sense of the community outraged by those in high places, and say no word, and lift no hand?'"

He took up a book that was lying on the table, and opened it at a marked page.

"Yes," he said, "there are occasions on which a man may justly take the law into his own hands; may break the law, and go beyond it, and punish those whom the law has failed to punish; and the moral sense of the world will say, 'Well done!' Did you ever happen to read, Mr. Brand, the letter written by Madame von Maderspach?"

Brand started at the mention of the name: it recalled the first evening on which he had seen Natalie. What strange things had happened since then! He answered that he did not know of Madame von Maderspach's letter.

"By chance I came across it to-day," said Lind, looking at the book. "Listen: '*I was torn from the arms of my husband, from the circle of my children, from the hallowed sanctuary of my home, charged with no offence, allowed no hearing, arraigned before no judge. I, a woman, wife, and mother, was in my own native town, before the people accustomed to treat me with respect, dragged into a square of soldiers, and there scourged with rods. Look, I can write this without dropping dead. But my husband killed himself. Robbed of all other weapons, he shot himself with a pocket-pistol. The people rose and would have killed those*

who instigated these horrors, but their lives were saved by the interference of the military.' Very well: Von Maderspach took his own way; he shot himself. But if, instead of doing that, he had taken the law into his own hands, and killed the author of such an outrage, do you think there is a human being in the world who would have blamed him?" .

He appealed directly to Brand. Brand answered calmly—but with his face grown rather white—"I think—if such a thing were done to —to my wife—I would have a shot at somebody."

Perhaps Lind thought that it was the recital of the wrongs of Madame von Maderspach that had made this man's face grow white and given him that look about the mouth; but at all events he continued—"Exactly so. I was only seeking to show you that there are occasions on which a man might justly take the law into his own hands. Well, then, some would argue—I don't say so myself—but some would say that what a man may do justly an association may do justly. What would the quick-spreading civilization of America have done but for the Lynch tribunals? The respectable people said to themselves, 'It

is a question of life or death. We have to attack those scoundrels at once; or society will be destroyed. We cannot wait for the law: it is powerless.' And so, when the president had given his decision, out they went and caught the scoundrels, and strung them up to the nearest tree. You do not call them murderers. John Lynch ought to have a statue in every western State in America."

"Certainly—certainly!" exclaimed Reitzei, reaching over and filling out another glass of brandy with an unsteady hand. He was usually an exceedingly temperate person. "We are all agreed. Justice must be done, whether the law allows or not. I say the quicker the better——"

Lind paid no heed to him, but proceeded quietly—"Now I will come more directly to what is required of us by the Council; I have been trying to guess at their view of the question; perhaps I am altogether wrong; but no matter. And I will ask you to imagine yourselves not here in this free country of England—where the law is strong; and not only that, but you have a public opinion that is stronger still; and where it is not possible that a great Churchman should be a man

living in open iniquity and an oppressor and a scoundrel—I will ask you to imagine yourselves living in Italy—let one say, in the Papal Territory itself, where the reign of Christ should be, and where the poor should be cared for, if there is Christianity still on the earth. And you are poor, let us say; hardly knowing how to scrape together a handful of food sometimes; and your children ragged and hungry; and you forced from time to time to go to the Monte di Pietà to pawn your small belongings, or else you will die, or you will see your children die, before your eyes."

"Ah, yes, yes!" exclaimed Reitzei. "That is the worst of it—to see one's children die! That is worse than one's own hunger."

"And you," continued Lind, quietly, but still with a little more distinctness of emphasis, "you, you poor devils, you see a great dignitary of the Church, a great Prince among priests, living in shameless luxury, in violation of every law human and divine, with the children of his mistresses set up in palaces, himself living on the fat of the land. What law does he not break, this libertine, this usurer? What makes the corn dear, so that you

cannot get it for your starving children?—what but this plunderer, this robber, seizing the funds that extremity has dragged from the poor in order to buy up the grain of the States. A pretty speculation! No wonder that you murmur and complain; that you curse him under your breath; that you call him *il cardinale affamatore*. And no wonder, if you happen to belong to a great association that has promised to see justice done, no wonder you come to that association and say, 'Masters, why cannot justice be done now? It is too long to wait for the Millennium. Remove this oppressor from the face of the earth: down with the Starving Cardinal!'"

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried Reitzei, excitedly. Beratinsky sat silent and sullen. Brand, with some strange foreboding of what was coming, still sat with his hand tight closed on Natalie's ring.

"More," continued Lind—and now, if he was acting, it was a rare piece of acting, for wrath and indignation gathered on his brow, and increased the emphasis of his voice. "It is not only your purses, it is not only your poor starved homesteadings that are attacked; it is the honour of your women. Whose sister or daughter is

safe? Mr. Brand, one of your English poets has made the poor cry to the rich—

> *'Our sons are your slaves by day,*
> *Our daughters your slaves by night!'*

But what if some day a poor man—I will tell you his name—his name is De Bedros—he is not a peasant, but a helpless, poor old man—what if this man comes to the great association that I have mentioned and says, wringing his hands, 'My Brothers and Companions, you have sworn to protect the weak, and avenge the injured: what is your oath worth, if you do not help me now? My daughter, my only daughter, has been taken from me, she has been stolen from my side, shrieking with fear, and I thrown bleeding into the ditch. By whom? By one who is beyond the law; who laughs at the law; who is the law! But you—you will be the avengers. Too long has this monster outraged the name of Christ and insulted the forbearance of his fellow-creatures: my Brothers, this is what I demand from your hands—I demand from the SOCIETY OF THE SEVEN STARS—I demand from you, the Council—I demand, my Brothers and Companions—a decree of death against the monster Zaccatelli!'"

"Yes, yes, yes, the decree!" shouted Reitzei, all trembling. "Who could refuse it? Or I myself——"

"Gentlemen," said Lind, calmly, "the decree has been granted. Here is my authority. Read it."

He held out the paper first of all to Brand, who took it in both his hands, and forced himself to go over it. But he could not read it very carefully; his heart was beating quickly; he was thinking of a great many things all at once—of Lord Evelyn, of Natalie, of his oaths to the Society, even of his Buckinghamshire home and the beech-woods. He handed on the paper to Reitzei, who was far too much excited to read it at all. Beratinsky merely glanced at it, carelessly; and put it back on the table.

"Gentlemen," Lind continued, returning to his unemotional manner, "personally, I consider it just that this man, whom the law cannot or does not choose to reach, should be punished for his long career of cruelty, oppression, and crime, and punished with death; but, as I confessed to you before, I could have wished that that punishment had not been delivered by our hands. We

have made great progress in England; and we have been preaching nothing but peace and good-will, and the use of lawful means of amelioration. If this deed is traced to our Society, as it almost certainly will be, it will do us a vast amount of injury here; for the English people will not be able to understand that such a state of affairs as I have described can exist, or that this is the only remedy. As I said to you before, it is with great reluctance that I summoned you here to-night——"

"Why so, Brother Lind?" Reitzei broke in, and again he reached over for the bottle. "We are not cowards, then?"

Beratinsky took the bottle from him and put it back on the table.

Reitzei did not resent this interference; he only tried to roll up a cigarette; and did not succeed very well with his trembling fingers.

"You will have seen," said Lind, continuing as if there had been no interruption, "why the Council have demanded this duty of the English section. The lesson would be thrown away altogether—a valuable life belonging to the Society would be lost—if it were supposed that

this was an act of private revenge. No; the death of Cardinal Zaccatelli will be a warning that Europe will take to heart. At least," he added, thoughtfully, "I hope it will prove to be so; and I hope it will be unnecessary to repeat the warning."

"You are exceedingly tender-hearted, Brother Lind," said Reitzei. "Do you pity this man then? Do you think he should flourish his crimes in the face of the world for another twenty, thirty years?"

"It is unnecessary to say what I think," observed Lind, in the same quiet fashion. "It is enough for us that we know our duty. The Council have commanded; we obey."

"Yes; but let us come to the point, Brother Lind," said Beratinsky, in a somewhat surly fashion. "I do not much care what happens to me: yet one wishes to know."

"Gentlemen," said Lind, composedly, "you know that among the ordinances of the Society is one to the effect that no member shall be sent on any duty involving peril to his life without a ballot among at least four persons. As this particular service is one demanding great secrecy

and circumspection I have considered it right to limit the ballot to four—to ourselves, in fact."

There was not a word said.

"That the duty involves peril to life is obvious; it will be a miracle if he who undertakes this affair should escape. As for myself, you will perceive by the paper you have read that I am commissioned by the Council to form the ballot; but not instructed to include myself. I could avoid doing so if I chose; but when I ask my friends to run a risk, I am willing to take the same risk. For the rest, I have been in as dangerous enterprises before."

He leant over and pulled towards him a sheet of paper. Then he took a pair of scissors and cut the sheet into four pieces: these he proceeded to fold up until they were about the size of a shilling, and identically alike. All the time he was talking.

"Yes, it will be a dangerous business," he said, slowly; "and one requiring great forethought and caution. Then I do not say it is altogether impossible one might escape; though then the warning, the lesson of this act of punishment might not be so effective: they might mistake

it for a Camorra affair, though the Cardinal himself already knows otherwise."

He opened a bottle of red ink that stood by.

"The simplest means are sufficient," said he. "This is how we used to settle affairs in '48."

He opened one of the pieces of paper, and put a cross in red on it, which he dried on the blotting-paper. Then he folded it up again; threw the four pieces into a pasteboard box; put down the lid; and shook the box lightly.

"Whoever draws the red cross," he said, almost indifferently, "carries out the command of the Council. Have you anything to say, gentlemen—to suggest?"

"Yes," said Reitzei, boldly.

Lind regarded him.

"What is the use of the ballot?" said the pallid-faced young man. "What if one volunteers? I should myself like to settle the business of the scoundrelly Cardinal."

Lind shook his head.

"Impossible. Calabressa thought of a volunteer; he was mad; there must be a ballot. Come; shall we proceed?"

He opened the box and put it before Bera-

tinsky. Beratinsky took out one of the papers, opened it, glanced at it, crumpled it up, and threw it into the fire.

"It isn't I, at all events," he said.

It was Reitzei next. When he glanced at the paper he had drawn, he crushed it together with an oath, and dashed it on the floor.

"Of course, of course," he exclaimed, "just when I was eager for a bit of active service. So it is either you, Brother Lind, or our friend Brand who is to settle the business of the Starving Cardinal."

Calmly, almost as a matter of course, Lind handed the box to George Brand; and he, being a proud man, and in the presence of foreigners, was resolved to show no sign of emotion whatever. When he took out the paper, and opened it, and saw his fate there in the red cross, he laid it on the table before him without a word. Then he shut his hand on Natalie's ring.

"Well," said Lind, rather sadly, as he took out the remaining paper without looking at it, and threw aside the box, "I almost regret it, as between you and me. I have less of life to look forward to."

"I would like to ask one question," said Brand, rising: he was perfectly firm.

"Yes?"

"The orders of the Council must be obeyed. I only wished to know whether—when—when this thing comes to be done—I must declare my own name."

"Not at all—not at all!" Lind said, quickly. "You may use any name you like."

"I am glad of that," he said. Then, with the same proud, impassive firmness, he made an appointment for the next day; got his hat and coat; bade his companions good-night; and went blindly out into the cold night-air. He could not realize as yet all that had happened; but his first quick, instinctive thought had been—

"Ah, not that—not the name that my mother bore!"

END OF VOL. II.

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